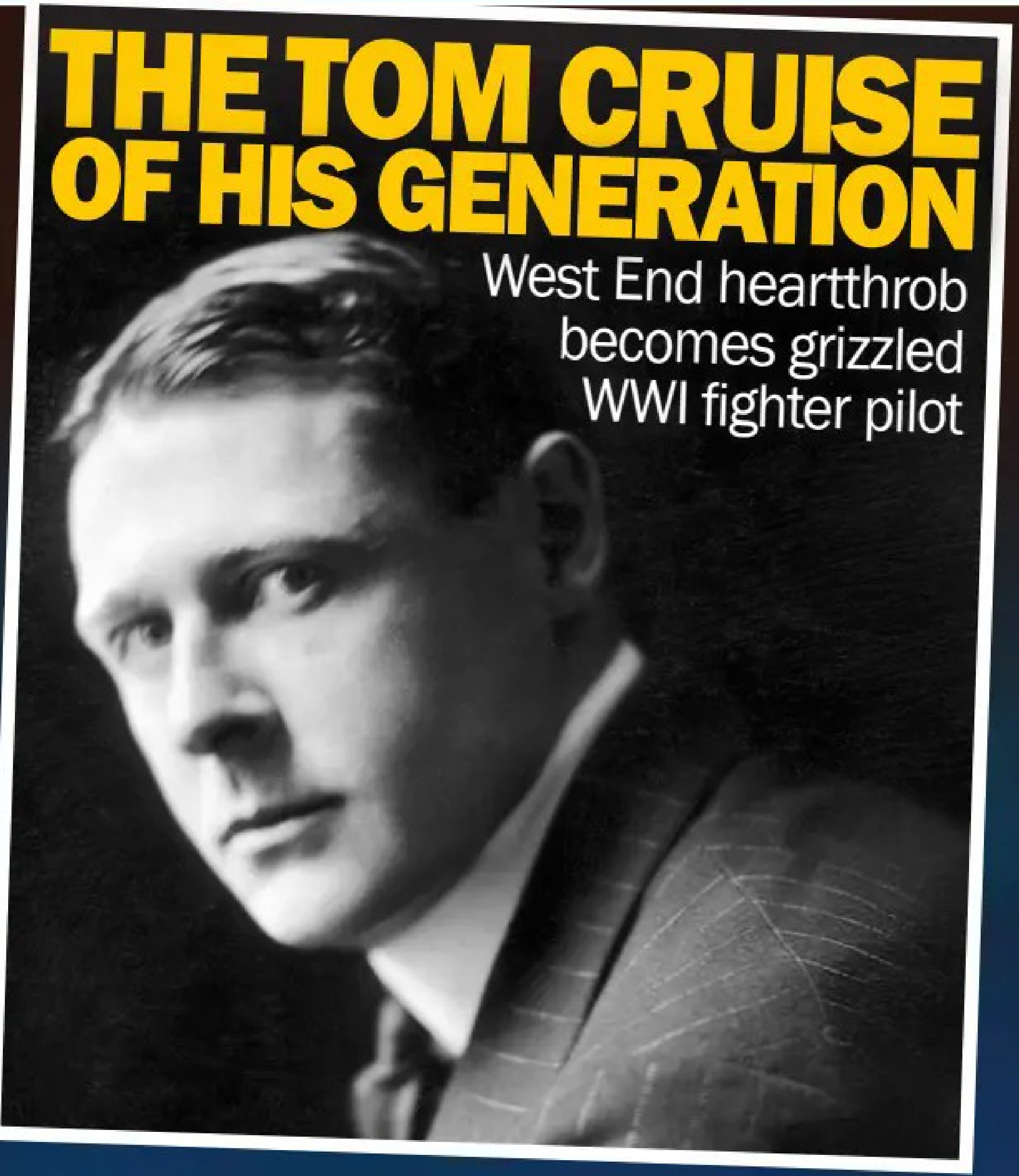
**TALKING TANKS** EXCLUSIVE TANK MUSEUM DOUBLE INTERVIEW

BRITAIN'S BEST-SELLING MILITARY MONTHLY

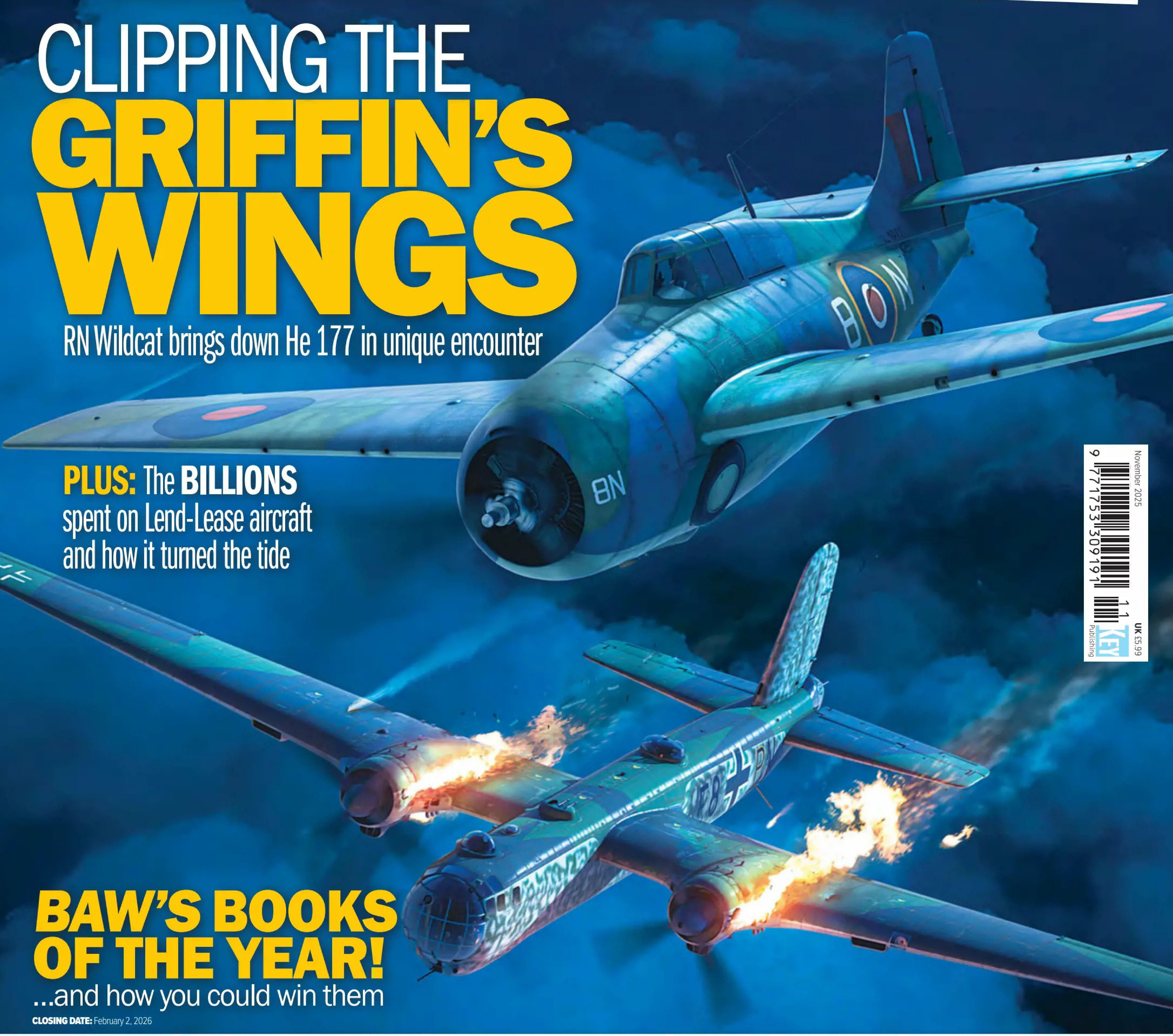
# BRITAIN AT WAR

ISSUE 223



## THE TOM CRUISE OF HIS GENERATION

West End heartthrob becomes grizzled WWI fighter pilot



## CLIPPING THE GRIFFIN'S WINGS

RN Wildcat brings down He 177 in unique encounter

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## D-DAY NO-SHOW

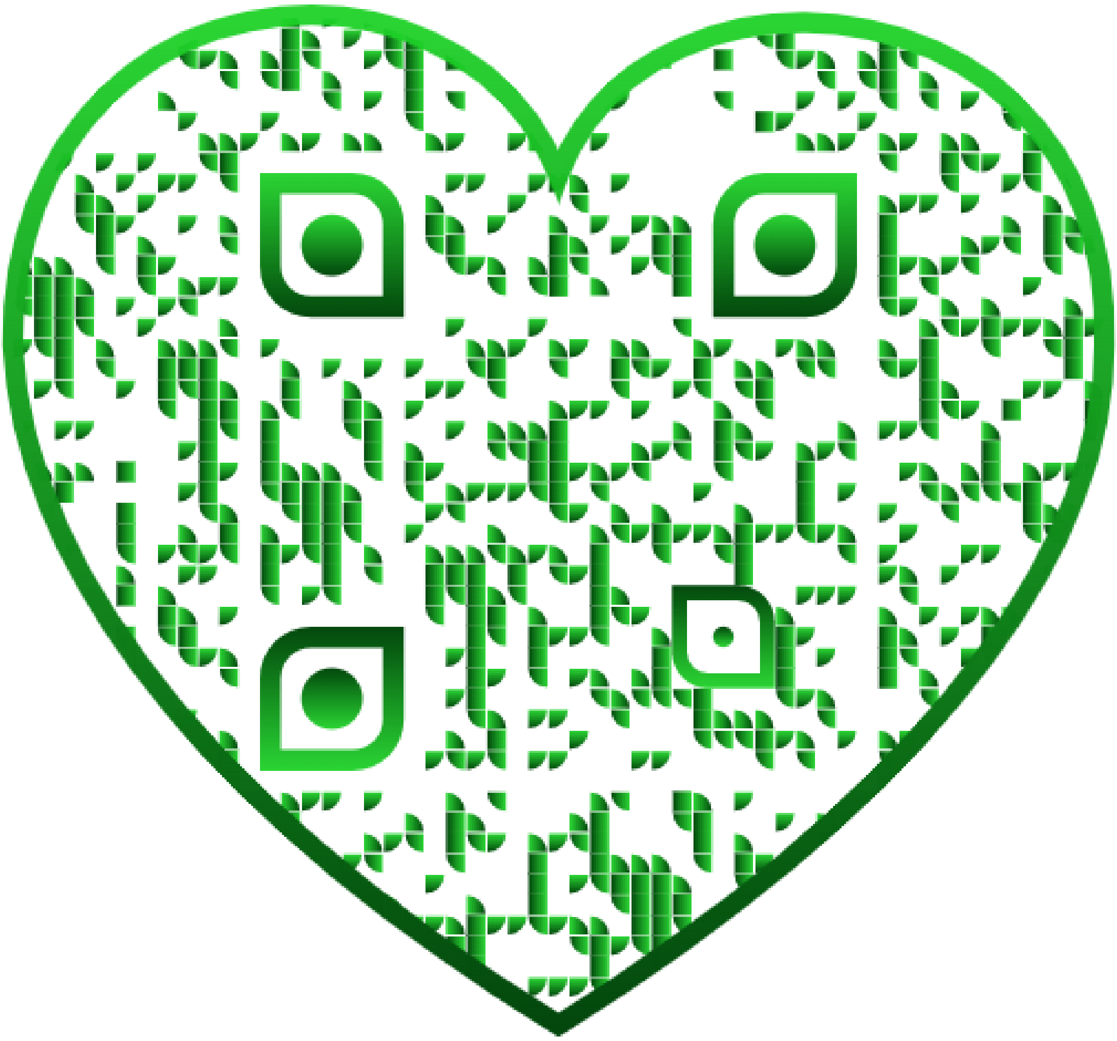
Why LVTs missed the first wave

## PANTHER ON THE PROWL

Royal Canadian Navy's sole Korean War pilot

## SKY-SWEEPER

Why Britain's autoloading, 96rpm, 4in anti-aircraft gun flopped



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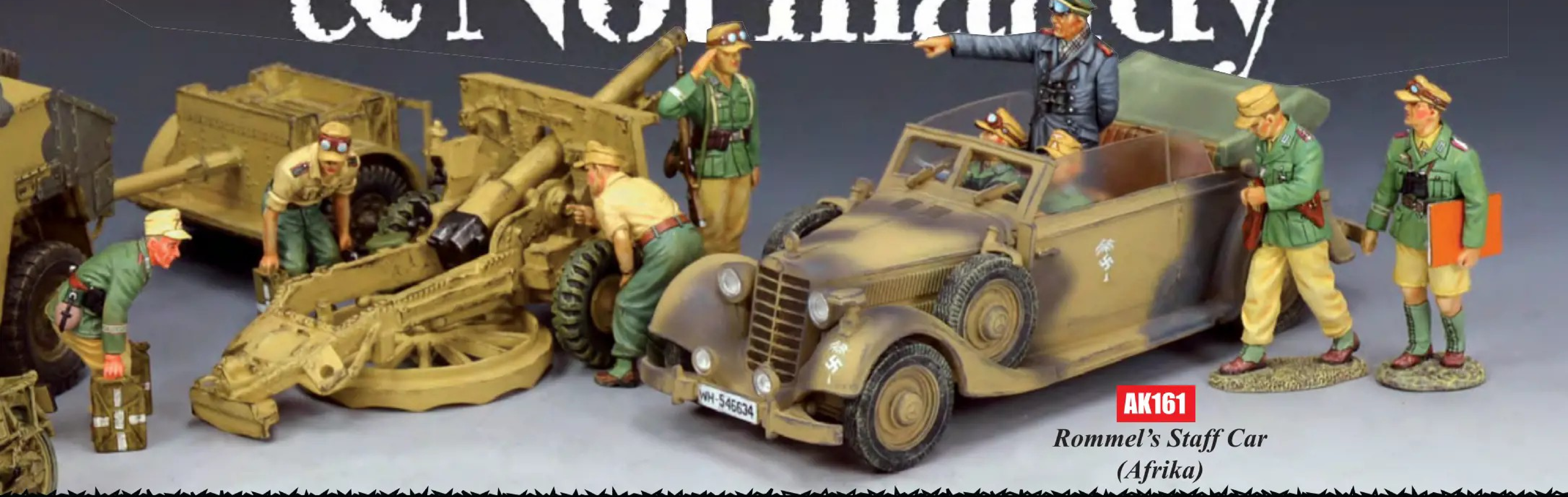
# Rommel in Afrika & Normandy



**AK161**

*Rommel's Staff Car (Afrika)*

**During WW2, even among his enemy opponents, *Field Marshal Erwin Rommel* was recognized as one of their finest and most able adversaries.**

Already a highly decorated infantry officer in World War 1 he proved himself a bold and aggressive armour commander leading the *7th Panzer Division* during the invasion of France in 1940.

His leadership of the *AFRIKA KORPS* during the campaign from 1941-1943 further enhanced his reputation as one of the best tank generals of the war and earned him the nickname... *"The Desert Fox"*.

By November 1943, Rommel became *General Inspector of the Western Defences* with the authority to travel, examine and improve Hitler's much-vaunted *'Atlantic Wall'*.

From that time almost until the *D.Day Invasion* of June 1944 Rommel and his staff ranged far and wide across his area of responsibility inspecting the existing network of defences while also reviewing the progress of those works still under construction.

Throughout his military career Erwin Rommel always *'Led from the front'* moving up to the frontline to see for himself how best to deal with any situations that might arise.

## ROMMEL'S STAFF CARS

These two new vehicles, both *'Mercedes 320 Cabriolets'* portray Rommel at different stages of his WW2 career… In North Africa with his *Afrika Korps* or somewhere in *Normandy* just before the invasion.

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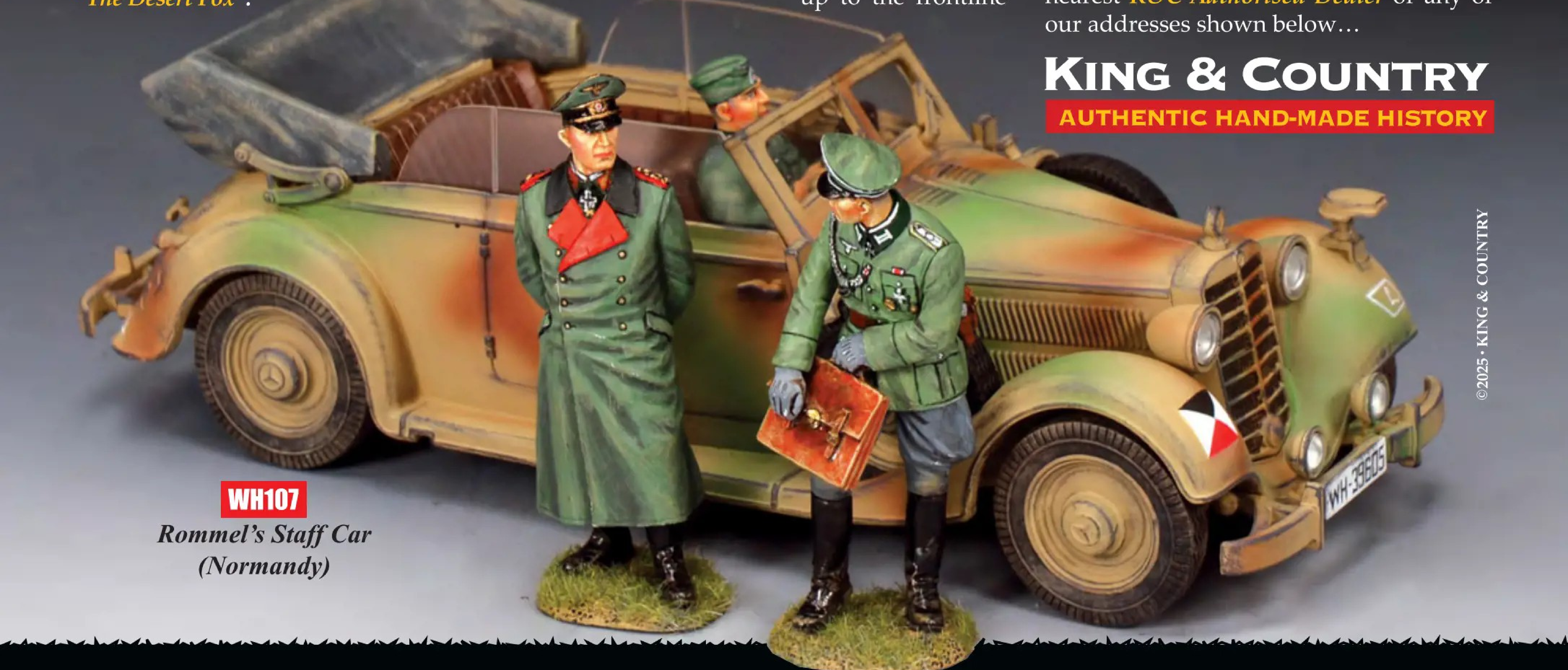

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*Rommel's Staff Car (Normandy)*

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# From the Editor

**The LVT family (the examples shown are off Iwo Jima) were used by Britain and the US in some of World War Two's largest amphibious operations. So where were they on D-Day?** US DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

Whether by inquisitive bosses or curious readers, I have often been asked what *Britain at War*'s 'remit' should be. For me, it's pretty simple. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland has a long martial history dating back to its foundation by Act of Union in 1707, and I consider important to recognise Britain's entire fighting past – even when that might actually be closer to the present! And it's also important to acknowledge the people who fought beside us and played an important role in many of our greatest victories, whether they be Canadian, Australian, New Zealanders, Indians or Gurkhas.

Of course, the world wars take priority as they are simply too big to ignore, but in the past we've also examined Victorian super weapons, wacky post-war prototypes, Empire-defining campaigns and thoroughly modern and contentious conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. We've even discovered how the British military would attempt a near-future Operation Biting. I've also enjoyed our occasional diversions into 'future tech', such as our recent article on the Boxer, and I think such profiles contrast nicely when we consider the future of the venerable 1960s vintage FV432, for example. Given *BAW*'s performance, I wager it is an approach most of you are very happy with.

However, we are condemned to live in interesting times – an ancient Chinese curse, not a proverb! Our two archive bloodhounds, Craig Moore and Ed Webster, attended the DESI 2025 at Excel London, swapping their regular duties of chasing down dusty files to interview the purveyors of the next generation of prototypes and demonstrators that may (or may not!) be ordered by the British military – so it's got me thinking about whether *BAW* should turn slightly more toward current and future affairs. While I believe a major war with a peer adversary is unlikely, it would be folly to ignore the new Cold War that the West has become engaged in. Do let me know what you think.

To business, and for a change let's start with the back. I was chatting to long-time contributor Mike Haskew recently and the topic of LVTs and D-Day came up – namely why the legendary US-made tracked landing vehicles were absent from Operation Overlord. Neither of us knew for shore (see what I did there?), so Mike decided to delve into the LVT story in *Weapons of War*.

Tragic though it is, there is something about warfare that really reveals one's character, charisma and personality. Robert Loraine was an individual blessed with all three. Sean Feast charts the career of the run-away actor who was Mentioned in Despatches twice in the Second Boer War, and who embraced the pre-World War One flying phenomenon to become a pre-eminent display pilot and notable wartime aviator.

The aforementioned Ed Webster reports on his latest archive finding, adding clarity to the history of Britain's Green Mace-type anti-aircraft superguns and discovering why these seemingly impressive weapons became nothing but a footnote in Cold War history. Meanwhile, Andrew Thomas has unearthed the story of the only Royal Canadian Navy pilot to serve in the Korean War, an airman flying American jets from a US Navy flattop whose unit grappled with MiGs.

Those who follow goings-on at Bovington's fantastic Tank Museum know there has been a changing of the guard, with plenty of happenings over the past year or two. *BAW* decided it was time for a catch up. We handed Phil Loder his movement orders and he spoke with Chris Smith and Chris Cobson about what's next for Britain's home of the tank.

Finally, our cover story. Many of you will have heard of the Junkers Ju 88, Heinkel He 111 and Dornier Do 17, the mainstays of the Luftwaffe's bomber force in the early years of the war. However, while I will not pretend that it is 'forgotten', I suspect many are less familiar with the He 177, Germany's sole wartime heavy bomber. It's an aircraft Chris Goss has studied in depth and in doing so learned of a unique incident involving the troubled bomber – its sole, and ill-fated, brush with the Fleet Air Arm.

Plenty there to sink your teeth into. Bon appetit!

**John Ash, Editor**

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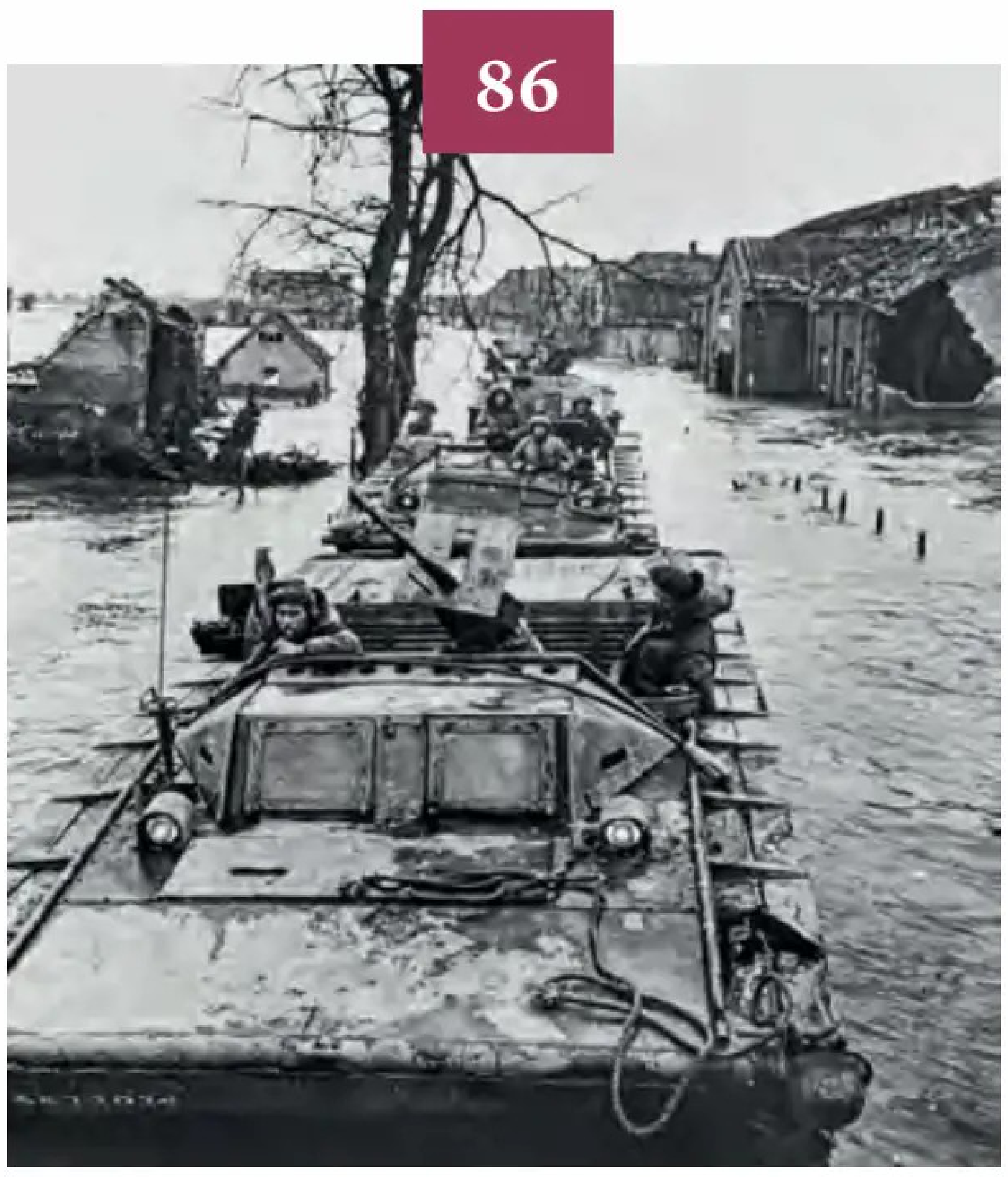

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Germany's sole heavy bomber type, the He 177, possessed the range and speed to menace Britain's convoys and when carrying the Hs 293 guided anti-ship missile posed a considerable risk to Allied shipping. However, in February 1944, Fleet Air Arm fighters put paid to one of the bombers in an unique encounter

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Why Britain's autoloading, 96rpm, 4in anti-aircraft gun flopped

MAIN IMAGE: Antonis Karidis
DESIGN: Steve Diggle

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# Britain secures its biggest warship deal

The first Type 26, HMS *Glasgow*, prior to launching in November 2022 IAN DICK

Following a landmark agreement, the Royal Norwegian Navy will operate Britain's Type 26 frigate, with the first expected to be delivered in 2029. Described by the MOD as the UK's "biggest ever warship export deal by value" and by Norway as its largest "defence capability investment" the £10bn partnership will see at least five Type 26 frigates enter Norwegian service to replace its Fridtjof Nansen-class frigates, safeguarding 4,000 British jobs across 400 businesses.

Norway's Type 26's will mirror the Royal Navy's in specifications, capability and role, enabling the Royal and Royal Norwegian navies to create a joint anti-submarine warfare surface group operating in the North Atlantic and in the High North based on a single, common design.

With up to 34 in build or on order, the Type 26 is the most successful British frigate since the Cold War-era Leanders. Excluding loaned vessels, it is also the first naval platform shared between the UK, Canada and Australia since the pre-war Tribal-class destroyers.

A multi-role 8,000-tonne frigate specialising in anti-submarine warfare, the Type 26 will be among the most common frigate designs in service in the western world, with Canada (15 vessels ordered), Australia (originally nine, reduced to six) and now Norway selecting the type, in addition to the Royal Navy, which will operate eight. Seven Type 26s are under construction presently – five in Scotland alone – with the first three expected to enter British service in 2028-2030.

However, as the Norwegian vessels are to be built in Scotland, the tight timeframe created by Norway's condition that its first ship be delivered in 2029 means one vessel currently under construction for the Royal Navy will likely be diverted. At time of writing, it is understood that the British order will remain at eight vessels, with a new ship laid down to replace the one bound for Oslo.

# POW camp opens near Peterborough

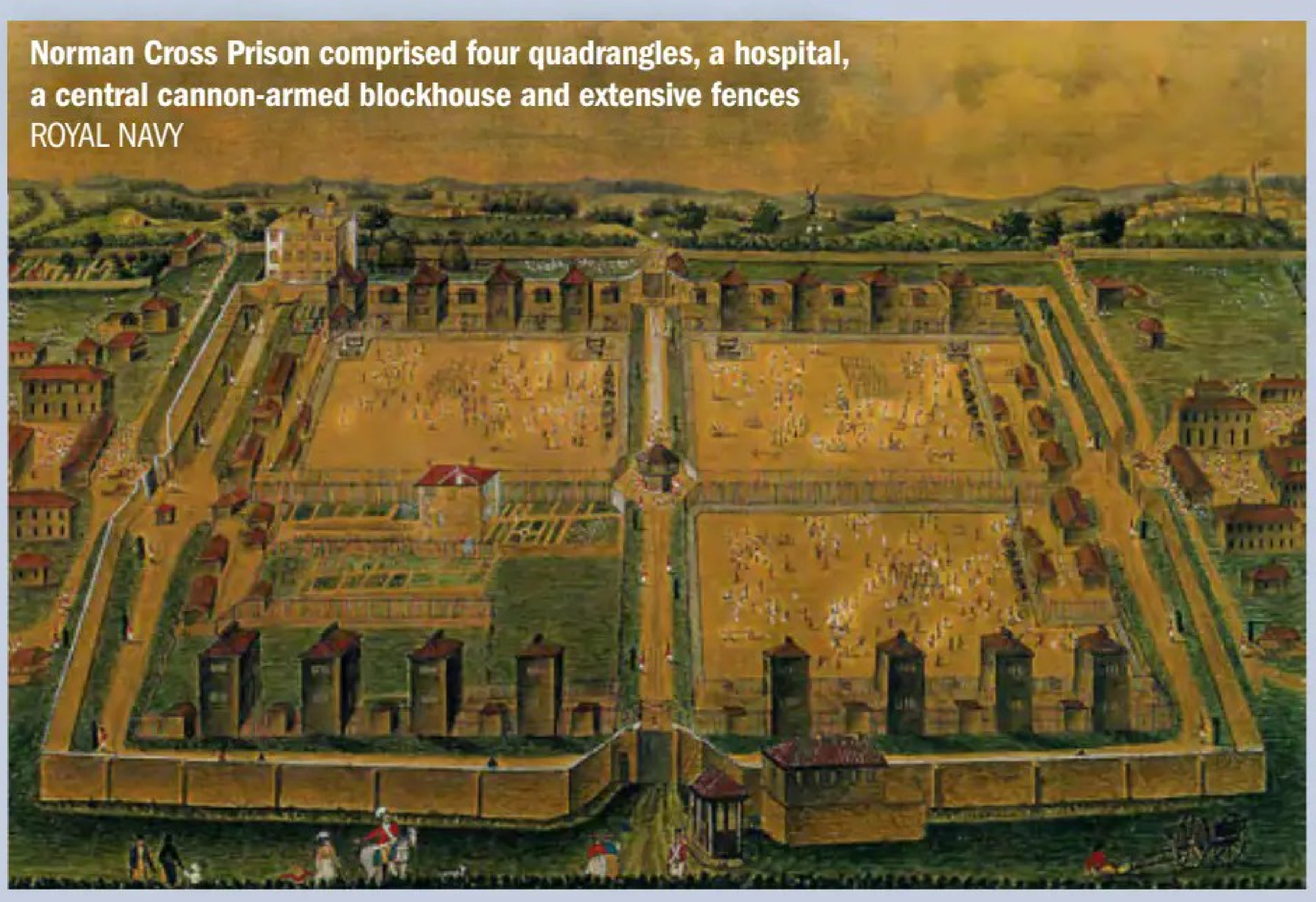
A 15-hectare site that is believed to be the first purpose-built POW camp is now open to the public.

The Norman Cross Prison in Yaxley, south of Peterborough in Cambridgeshire, dates back to 1796 and housed about 7,000 French prisoners from the Napoleonic Wars. Today, a few fragments of the camp – or 'depot' in contemporary terminology – remain, as does a memorial to the 1,770 POWs who died there before it closed in 1814. Having been acquired by the Nene Park Trust earlier in 2025, the site has been readied with information panels, videos and digital tools to help bring the Napoleonic War-era location to life.

The concept of housing military prisoners dates to the early days of organised warfare and early facilities for controlled confinement of battle captives include the medieval Tower of London and Edinburgh Castle, as well as the Ear of Dionysus in classical Syracuse, Sicily. However, the Yaxley site is understood to have been the first purpose-built prison for recognised POWs in history.

Operated by the Admiralty, Norman Cross was designed as a self-contained facility with barracks, hospital, school and banking facilities. Located far from the sea and potential invasion routes, escape to France was difficult, with POWS transported from Great Yarmouth, King's Lynn and Boston to Peterborough and marched to the camp.

In 1801 the population of the nearby villages of Yaxley, Stilton and Folksworth was just 986, 509 and 119 respectively. While Peterborough's population today approaches 220,000, at the time it was only 3,500. Norman Cross, with its capacity of 7,000 POWs as well as 500 guards, therefore had a profound impact on the local area. Staff were recruited locally, while provision for food, the beer ration (two pints daily for POWs and five(!) for guards) and the removal of 'night soil' were put in place. A market enabled the prisoners to create and sell goods and hand-crafted products, while paroled officers and the camp guards settled in the area, sometimes even with their families.



Norman Cross Prison comprised four quadrangles, a hospital, a central cannon-armed blockhouse and extensive fences
ROYAL NAVY

The site was revamped with funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Historic England. The Nene Park Trust hopes to continue developing options for visitors, including more volunteer-led guided walks. Trust chief executive, Matthew Bradbury, commented: "Norman Cross brings an exciting opportunity for the Trust to expand our work to conserve and interpret some of the most significant historic sites across Peterborough. We look forward to welcoming visitors and telling them the story of this fascinating site."

# *Prince of Wales* and Japan remember Force 'Z'

**The aircraft carrier HMS *Prince of Wales* and the destroyer JS *Akebono* have commemorated the loss of the carrier's namesake, the battleship *Prince of Wales*, as well as the battlecruiser *Repulse*. Both capital ships – sailing as Force 'Z' – were sunk by Japanese land-based bombers on December 10, 1941. In September 2025, both navies came together to commit wreaths over the wreck sites and Japanese sailors fired a gun salute. HMS *Prince of Wales* is currently deployed on Operation Highmast, an eight-month mission to foster the enduring partnership between Britain and Japan and reaffirm British defence commitments to the Mediterranean and Indo-Pacific regions** PO PHOT RORY ARNOLD/MOD

# *Conquerors*' last 'deep' retires

A Royal Navy submariner who served in the Falklands conflict and on HMS *Vanguard's* first deterrence patrol has retired after a remarkable 46-year career. Chief Petter Officer Gary Hutchinson was the last serving submariner who was aboard HMS *Conqueror* during the 1982 war and also the last serving British submariner to witness a torpedo fired in anger when the hunter-killer sank the cruiser ARA *General Belgrano*.

The Yorkshire-born 'deep' joined the Royal Navy in November 1979, aged 19, and volunteered for the Submarine Service after basic training. In 1981, he joined *Conqueror* as a marine engineer mechanic. The submarine went south the day after Argentina invaded the Falkland Islands in April 1982 and, three weeks after leaving Scotland, *Conqueror* arrived in the region with orders to search for Argentinian warships. On April 30, she detected a task force sailing towards the exclusion zone. Fearing an envelopment by two powerful Argentinian surface groups, *Conqueror* received permission to engage, subsequently sinking the *Belgrano* with three torpedoes.

Gary remembered: "At the time, I was serving as a control room watchkeeper and was in the auxiliary machine space when we sank the *Belgrano*. We worked hard under immense pressure, but, as a young man, I treated the whole experience as an adventure. At the time of firing, it just felt like regular practice. The crew often trained for fire drills should the occasion arise, and, in this case, it finally did."

Gary served on *Conks* for a decade before transferring to the then-new Vanguard-class nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines as the lead ship, HMS *Vanguard*, was still in-build. Part of the crew to first take the boat to sea, Gary was also involved in the first UK test-firing of the Trident nuclear missile and completed Britain's maiden Trident-armed deterrence patrol. More recently, he worked at HMNB Clyde's Shiplift, the engineering facility capable of hauling the 14,000-tonne Vanguard-class boats from the water for essential maintenance.

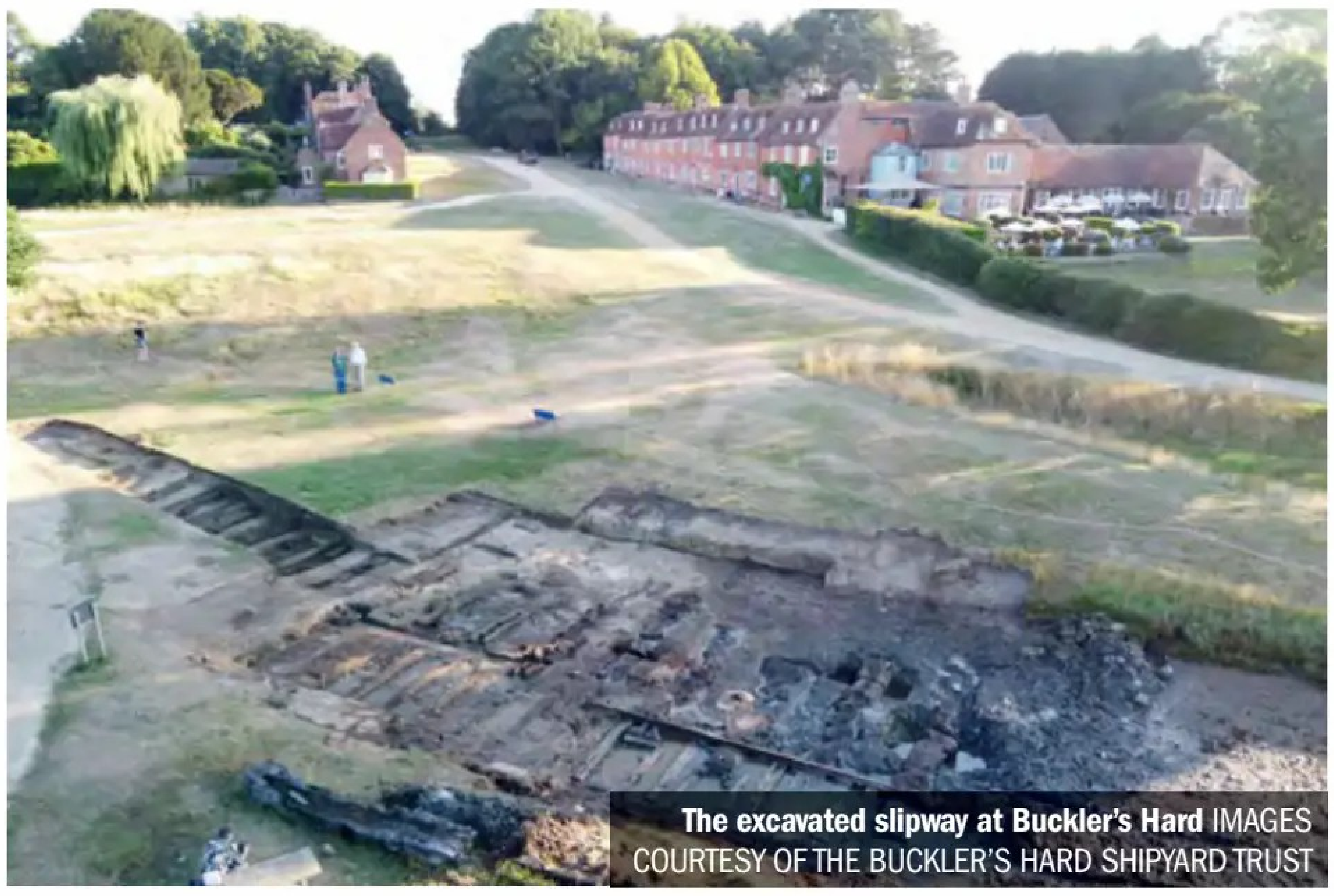
**CPO Gary Hutchinson (centre) with Admiral Sir Tim McClement (left) and Rear Admiral Andrew Perks at Gary's retirement ceremony** ROYAL NAVY/MOD

Current and trainee submariners filled the HMS *Conqueror* lecture hall in the new Submarine Training Centre at HMNB Clyde to thank the 64-year-old submariner. It fell to Vice Admiral Sir Tim McClement – *Conqueror's* executive officer in 1982 – to present the senior rating with his golden valedictory certificate. "It's the first time we've seen one another since the Falklands," said Admiral Sir Tim said. "When I was asked to fly up to present this award, I leapt at the chance!"

Rear Admiral Andrew Perks also attended and commented: "CPO Hutchinson's remarkable career has spanned several chapters of Submarine Service history. He has exemplified the very best of our Silent Service throughout his career and I wish him and his family all the best as he transitions into a well-earned retirement."

Gary said: "I will miss the camaraderie and being in the submarine community. I have really enjoyed being in the service and would recommend it to anyone. When I joined, I originally signed-up for nine years, but have actually completed 46!"

# Remarkable finds at historic slipway



**The excavated slipway at Buckler's Hard** IMAGES COURTESY OF THE BUCKLER'S HARD SHIPYARD TRUST

An excavation at Buckler's Hard on the Beaulieu River in Hampshire has uncovered a 18th Century slipway.

Over the summer, a three-week archaeological dig was conducted by The Buckler's Hard Shipyard Trust, supported by the University of Southampton's Centre for Maritime Archaeology, the Maritime Archaeology Trust, New Forest National Park Authority volunteers and the local community. The slipway was once part of Buckler's Hard Shipyard, once one of the largest private dockyards in Britain.

The most significant find was the well-preserved timber base and sides of the slipway, constructed from large tree trunks laid down to support keel blocks. Samples have been taken for dating, and it is believed some of the trees may have been planted in the 1500s. Archaeologists also found nails, ceramics, glass, clay pipes and animal bones. Modern debris has also been uncovered, revealing more about Buckler's Hard's role in World War Two.

Shipbuilding at Buckler's Hard commenced in the mid-1740s, when James Wyatt won a contract to build HMS *Surprise* and HMS *Scorpion*. In 1744, master shipwright Henry Adams was sent to oversee construction there and, across the next six decades, he supervised the building of 43 warships, including three that fought at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805: the 36-gun frigate *Euryalus*, the 74-gun third-rate ship of the line *Swiftsure* and Lord Nelson's "favourite vessel" *Agamemnon*, a 64-gun third-rate.

The excavation area has since been backfilled to protect the slipway and further digs are planned for next summer.

**A selection of excavated historic finds**

Mary Montagu Scott, chair of the Buckler's Hard Shipyard Trust, said: "The dig exceeded all expectations as so much of the structure has survived preserved under the mud and soil. This will give a greater understanding of how the largest 64- and 74-gun ships were built and launched across the bend in the river. I enjoyed digging with the team and was amazed how much we uncovered each day, but there is still so much more to excavate in the future to aid our understanding."

# D-Day veteran gets 16,000 birthday cards

Royal Navy veteran Dougie Shelley, who served as a gunner on D-Day and helped to keep the skies clear of enemy aircraft and to protect troops as they landed in Normandy, celebrated his 100th birthday with a tot of rum while surrounded by more than 16,000 greeting cards. The Southend-on-Sea branch of the Royal Naval Association marked the occasion with a tea party after having appealed to the public to send cards. Among the 16,000 to arrive from all across the world was one from King Charles and Queen Camilla.

Shelley, who enlisted when he was just 17 years old, served on the frigate HMS *Meon* and the destroyer HMS *Milne* during World War Two and also sailed on the Arctic Convoys to the Soviet Union. "Thanks to every sender for their kindness, it makes me feel very special," he said.

# Reaper bows out

The MQ-9A Reaper has flown its last RAF mission, ending an 18-year service life. First introduced to the RAF in 2007, the MQ-9A was a remotely piloted aircraft deployed to support British/aligned forces in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria.

RPAS – remotely piloted air systems – are an older technology than many might imagine, with Britain operating Queen Bee target drones in the 1930s. Over time, uncrewed aircraft became reconnaissance and intelligence-gathering platforms, but it was not until the introduction of the Reaper that the RAF adopted an armed drone. In RAF service, Reaper flew more than 173,000 hours. Operated from RAF Waddington in Lincolnshire, each mission involved a UK-based pilot, a sensor operator and a mission intelligence co-ordinator while the aircraft flew over the Middle East.

**A Hellfire-armed RAF Reaper RPAS in 2023** SERGEANT PAUL OLDFIELD/RAF

Reaper has been replaced by the MQ-9B Protector RG Mk.I. Designed to fly for missions exceeding 40 hours, Protector will be used for surveillance, search and rescue and armed tasks.

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# Tiger 131 yields new secret

**Tiger 131 was captured in 1943 and is today preserved at The Tank Museum** BOTH IMAGES COURTESY OF THE TANK MUSEUM

The world's most famous tank continues to reveal secrets – perhaps leaving more questions than answers – as routine maintenance discovered a literal fragment of history.

Tiger 131, currently the only original, running Tiger I tank in the world, was captured by British forces during the Battle of Longstop Hill in Tunisia in 1943. It is preserved and kept in working order by The Tank Museum in Dorset. Maintaining an 80-year-old tank requires regular serving by the museum's workshop team, but despite their familiarity with Tiger 131 the tank can sometimes prove capable of a surprise and engineers performing a routine inspection were stunned to discover a chunk of shrapnel inside one of the tank's wheels.

On April 24, 1943, British forces advancing towards Tunis captured an important position in the hills at Medjez-al-Bab and held the area against a strong counterattack that included Tiger 131. British armour arrived just in time to prevent the infantry being overrun and Tiger 131 was disabled in the fighting. With their tank rendered inoperable, 131's crew fled without fulfilling their orders to destroy the tank and prevent its capture. Under heavy shelling, the British held the hill for several days with the Tiger abandoned among their positions, during which it took further damage – its battle scars have been preserved and are still visible today. When Tiger 131 was recovered and sent back for evaluation, it was found to be relatively undamaged, apart from a shot that had wedged itself in the turret mechanism and disabled the main gun.

Regarding the new discovery, historian James Donaldson explained: "We're not certain if this shrapnel was a result of British tank shots or the German artillery fire that British troops were subjected to, [but] it's a heavy lump of metal, typical of the sort that would have been flying around the battlefield. You can only imagine what this would have done had it hit someone."

Nick Booth, head of curatorial services at The Tank Museum, said: "Tiger 131 has been extensively restored and overhauled in recent years, so to find a remnant from the battle in which it was captured is both remarkable and sobering."

**The newly discovered piece of shrapnel removed from 131's running gear**

# Para becomes regiment's first 'Beefeater'

Former paratrooper Lee Fox is the first member of The Parachute Regiment to become a Yeoman Warder – popularly known as Beefeaters – at the Tower of London.

The ceremonial guards at the historic fortress were introduced in 1485 and today lead tours for the visiting public, as well as completing traditional duties and ceremonies. However, a high bar must be surpassed in order to become a Yeoman Warder, with the base requirements set at 22 years of military service (minimum), receipt of the Long Service and Good Conduct Medal, and applicants must have attained the rank of warrant officer or its equivalents before they can even be interviewed.

Lincolnshire-born Fox, a former Pegasus Company sergeant major, served in Northern Ireland, Iraq and Afghanistan during his 23 years of service. His first day as a Beefeater was in early October 2025 and he is getting to grips with the 21 separate duties conducted by the Yeoman Body daily, including the ancient Ceremony of the Keys, which has taken place every night for at least 700 years. Fox is also having to memorise 'The Story', an 8,000-word script, so he can guide visitors around the Tower as part of the famous Yeoman Warder tour.

According to Historic Royal Palaces, Fox's new job title is Yeoman Warder of His Majesty's Royal Palace and Fortress the Tower of London and Yeoman of the Guard in Extraordinary. Why the guards are known as Beefeaters has been lost to history, but it is not because their full job title is a mouthful! In fact, the most likely explanation is that Yeoman Warders were given a daily ration of meat and, in 1813, the ration for 30 Yeoman was 24lb of beef, 18lb of mutton and 16lb of veal.

Fox joins 34 other Yeoman Warders, who all live within the castle's outer walls, often with their families and pets. He told the BBC: "I've served the monarch my whole life, so to continue to do that as one of the King's bodyguards is absolutely unbelievable. When the public are out, it goes really quiet. It's so surreal and there's some pinch me moments. It's genuinely brilliant."

# The West’s best general is...

Voters at September’s **We Have Ways Festival** crowned one World War Two general as the ‘best of the West’. *BAW*’s **Toby Clarke** was there to witness the coronation

THE BRIEFING ROOM

Festivalgoers flock to one of the talk venues

As a historian interested in World War Two, there has always been a stumbling block: I have had to set aside considerable time for the contemplation of which general was best. It’s not ideal because it takes a lot of time out of my day; time that could be spent thinking about Tiger tanks or Chindits.

However, help is at hand, because the two podcasters I trust most on wartime matters have settled the issue. This year I was fortunate enough to be invited to the We Have Ways Festival to see what it was all about and therefore have watched the selection process for the best general in the West from start to finish.

James Holland and Al Murray, co-hosts of the three-day show and of the *We Have Ways of Making You Talk* podcast from whence it came, began the effort some weeks before. Speaking on the podcast, Holland and Murray sought to decide which general from the Western theatre of war was best. They began with pool stages in which generals from German, American and DUKE (Dominion, United Kingdom and Empire) forces were discussed, the votes at this stage gathered from the podcast’s paying subscribers. The three finals took place in front of live audiences at the festival where historians made cases for and against for each figure. Ultimately, the best three competed in a grand finale.

If you have not listened to the podcast episodes, you are missing out. The author reserves his admiration for the tactical flair shown by DUKE generals Richard O’Connor in Operation Compass in Cyrenaica or Francis Tuker during Operation Scipio in Tunisia, but had you heard of Hans-Valentin Hube, the one-armed generaloberst rather brilliantly known as ‘Der Man’? The main problem with being German was that they were trying to wage the largest war in history without enough gear and with a commander-in-chief who was not intelligent enough.

**WHWF attendees selected Field Marshal Harold Alexander, 1st Earl of Tunis, as the ’best in the West’** NEDERLANDS NATIONAAL ARCHIEF

Inexplicably, for a British-based podcast, two DUKE generals reached the final. A fresh round of voting saw Generalfeldmarschall Walter Model excluded from the

Author Toby Clarke stands beneath the 'best in the West' runner-up, Field Marshal Montgomery

KEEP AWAY
UNEXPLODED
BOMB.
DANGER!
KEEP OUT!

The festival combines living history displays with conference-style lectures to suit any discerning World War Two enthusiast

final on account of being defeated (German); leaving just Generals Harold Alexander and Bernard Montgomery. This was an interesting development because Murray and Holland have made strong personal cases for them – indeed, both field marshals by the end of the war – as the greatest commanders of all. I see no reason to doubt either's credibility and one has to respect the powers of persuasion of the co-hosts.

It was a two-horse race with one clear winner: Harold Alexander. So, there you have it, the great question settled unequivocally at last. The finest general in the Western theatre of war is good old 'Alex'.

It was a crushing victory that seemed to displease Murray and delight Holland, who has long championed Alexander – he is also contracted to write the authorised biography of Alexander, but a gentleman wouldn't mention this; so, I won't.

Having settled that debate, it is time to answer the major question that arises around this festival in particular: does the We Have Ways Fest justify the asking price?

A day ticket for Friday or Saturday will set you back £100, whereas for the full three days a weekend ticket costs just shy of £200. However, under-16s enter for free. In terms of camping, this has grown enormously, it truly looked like mini Glastonbury and is an inexpensive alternative to a hotel. There were various glamping options ranging from two-person tents from £250 to £700 palace tents.

It is tricky because this festival is not really like others. There were 65 different speakers to listen to. They were as diverse as the study of World War Two will allow, meaning visitors could find at least one – probably more – things to interest them. Personal highlights included Luke Turner speaking about his book *Men at War*, James Holland's tour de force on the arsenal of democracy and Tami Davis Biddle and Victoria Taylor discussing airpower.

Just as a comparable literary festival could have famous names and renowned academics, a literary festival would not have the breadth of other activities. The book shop and scale modelling portions of the show deserve mention on their own because they were thriving and brilliant. Then there were stalls selling gear, paintings and a huge variety of food and drink. A large volume of living historians and vehicles moved around the site, and besides the array of infantrymen, paratroopers and vehicle crews there were fascinating extras. To give some idea, those who happily answered the author's questions included those portraying war correspondents, Home Guardsmen, bomb disposal technicians and saboteurs.

The venue was kept clean and secure – something to encourage those leaving cars and tents. Festival staff were ever-present, attentive and polite. In addition, the site was well laid out for those with mobility issues and there was even a dedicated quiet area. If there was a complaint it was the site itself, which is now too small to fit everyone. Moving between talks was a slow, shuffling process. Nor could everyone get a seat in even the largest lecture tent – I sat on the floor and was none the worse, but that is not acceptable for everyone who attends.

For 'bang for your buck', the We Have Ways Festival is worth it; at least for one visit. That way you can say: "Yes, I have seen a Spitfire do barrel rolls over my head, a pair of Sherman tanks at full speed, a 25-pounder battery open up and spent a weekend in the community of like-minded people who will make you feel welcome." BW

The show's arena also hosts displays of moving armour and vehicles

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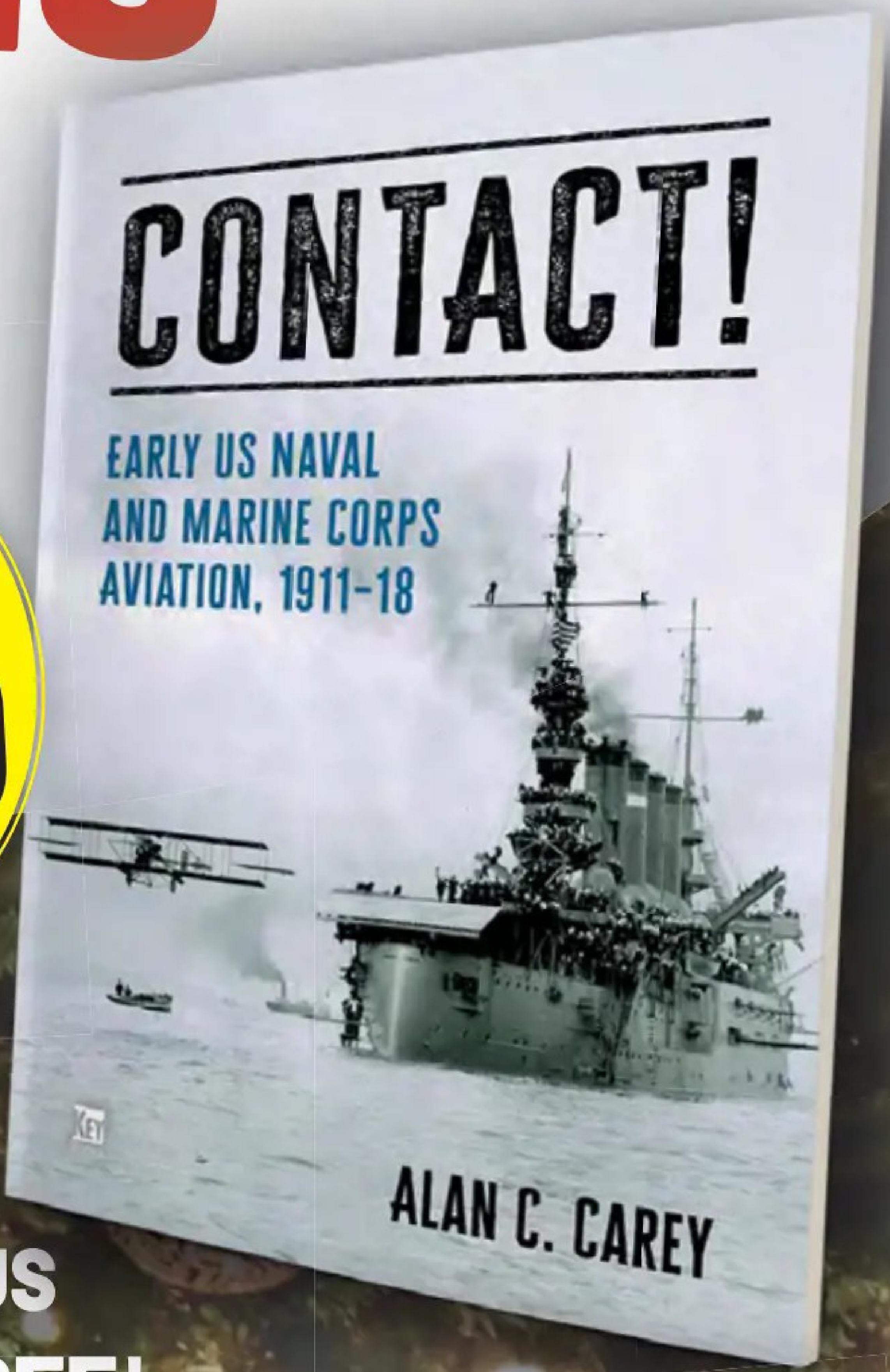
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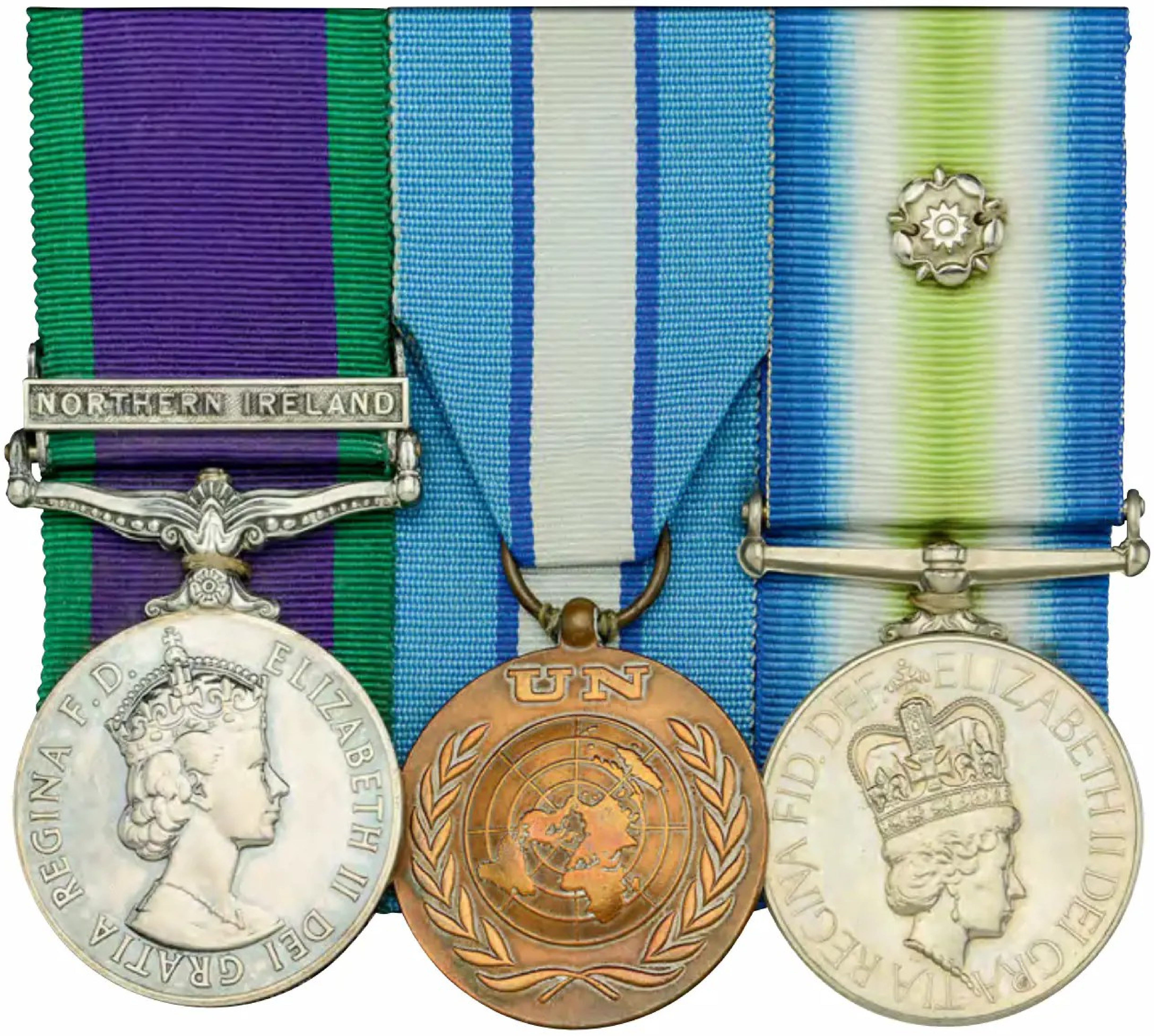
# Despatches

Campaign medals for Rorke's Drift and the Iranian Embassy Siege, alongside Napoleon's favourite cloak clasp, were among recent auction highlights

## SAS HERO'S CAMPAIGN GROUP STORMS AUCTION

**Three medals awarded to an SAS warrant officer who stormed the fourth floor of the Iranian Embassy have gone under the hammer**


NORTHERN IRELAND
REGINA F. D. ELIZABETH II DEI GRATIA
UN
REGINA FID. DEF. ELIZABETH II DEI GRATIA

NOONANS

The Iranian Embassy siege, broadcast live to millions of viewers between April 30 to May 5, 1980, brought the Special Air Service into the public eye. Interest in this elite group has persisted since, and a medal group awarded to one of the 32 troopers who stormed the embassy has sold with Noonans.

Seeking discipline and purpose, 15-year-old David John Beddow enlisted in the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers in 1968, beginning his military career at the Infantry Junior Leaders Battalion in Oswestry, Shropshire. After two years, he completed his first parachute jump at the Joint Services Parachute Centre in Netheravon, and that same year, set a record for the Junior Welsh 3000 – a challenging hike in Snowdonia.

Soon after, Beddow transferred to the Parachute Regiment. After enduring the rigours of 'P' Company, he was posted to the 3rd Battalion in December 1970. Promoted to lance corporal, Beddow later attended the Section Commander's Course at the regiment's battle school in Brecon, before transferring to the 1st Battalion.

After participating in Operation Motorman – the effort to retake no-go areas in Northern Ireland – the para instructed recruits at the regimental depot between 1973-1976. Restless, Beddow volunteered for the SAS in August 1976. Passing the regiment's famously gruelling selection process, he was posted to 'B' Squadron, 7 Troop (Air), underwent HALO jump training and qualified as a signaller and patrol medic.

The defining moment of Beddow's career came on May 5, 1980, when the siege of 16 Prince's Gate in Kensington reached a crisis point following the execution of one of the hostages. At 1923hrs, Operation Nimrod was put into effect and Beddow's team, Sierra One, breached from the roof. Using a sledgehammer, the trooper smashed through the fourth-floor skylight and began clearing the upper rooms before descending towards the hostages.

After neutralising one of the gunmen, the SAS began evacuating the hostages. However, two terrorists hid among them. One produced a grenade but was pushed to the bottom of the stairs and killed. The raid lasted just 17 minutes and all bar one of the hostages were rescued alive with all of the terrorists were killed or captured.

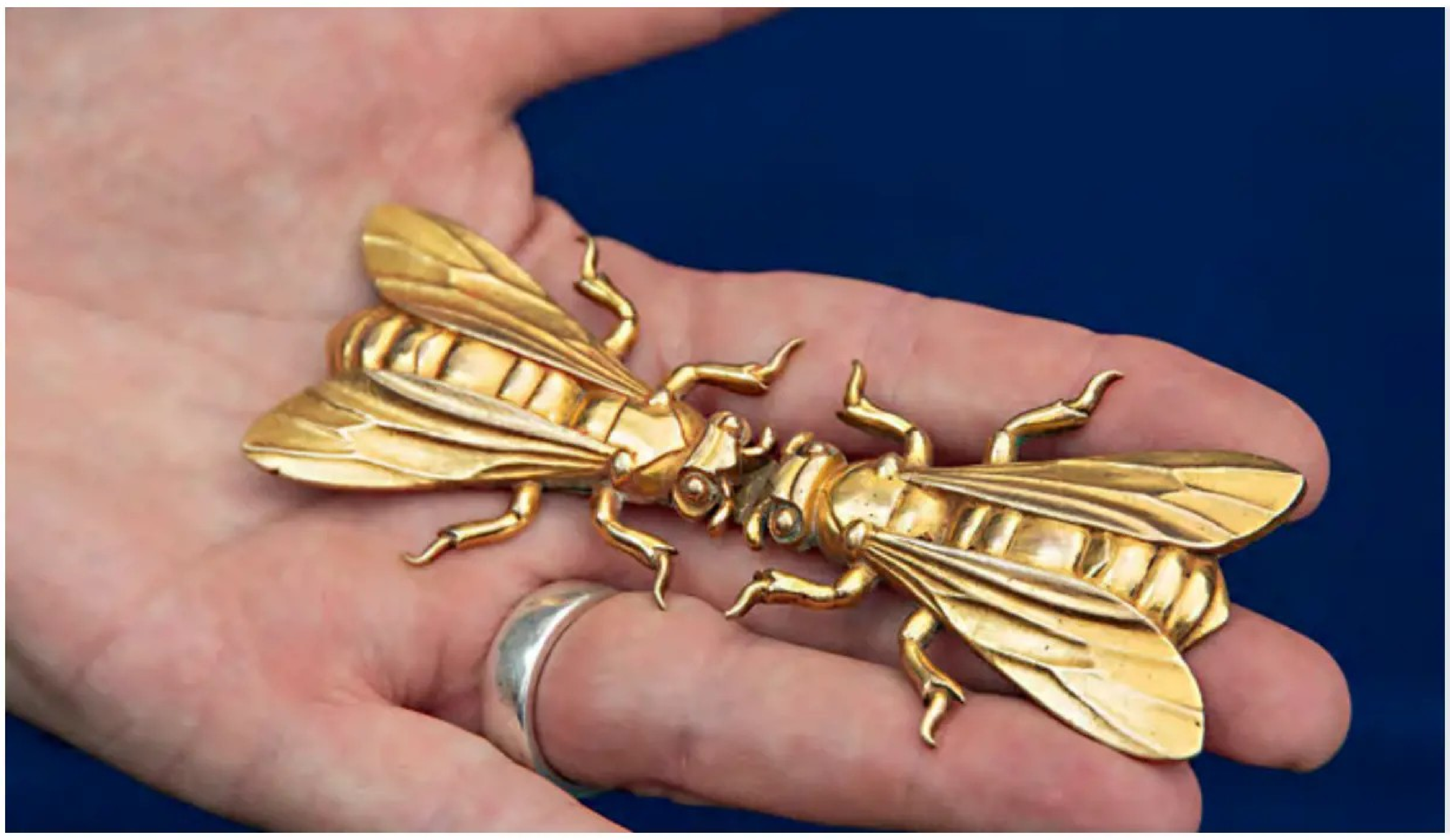
Two years later, as part of 'B' Squadron, Beddow was detailed for Operation Mikado, a proposed strike against Argentinian Super Étendard strike aircraft (which were capable of launching he Exocet missile) at Río Grande, Tierra del Fuego. The audacious plan to target the Argentine Air Force in its own backyard was cancelled at the eleventh hour, but Beddow and his troop were kept on stand-by. While waiting, news reached the men of the loss of Sea King HC.4 ZA294 and the 18 SAS troopers aboard it in what was the largest loss of life in a single incident for the regiment since World War Two. Beddow and his troop were later deployed by parachute into the South Atlantic, but the trooper lost much of his equipment. Shortly after, their mission was cut short when news arrived of Argentina's surrender.

Beddow's military service continued through the 1980s, encompassing tours of Northern Ireland, overseas deployments and two years assessing new candidates for the regiment. He later joined the Permanent Cadre, serving as the Troop Staff Sergeant in 16 Troop (Air), 'D' Squadron, before concluding his career in a training role as warrant officer (class II) with 21 SAS (V). Discharged in July 1993, Beddow had completed almost 25 years of service.

The lot comprised his General Service Medal 1962–2007 with Northern Ireland clasp, UN Medal and South Atlantic Medal. Guided at £8,000-£12,000, the group drew considerable interest and sold for £16,000.

# NAPOLEON'S 'BEE CLASP' GETS BUYERS BUZZING

**A rare cloak clasp reputedly taken from Longwood House on St Helena following Napoleon's death has prompted interest with buyers at Hansons**


HANSONS

The cast gilt metal cloak clasp takes the form of two bees and came from the descendant of a soldier of the 66th (Berkshire) Regiment of Foot, a unit that was stationed on the remote island of St Helena (1,250 miles off the coast of West Africa) with the purpose of guarding the exiled French emperor.

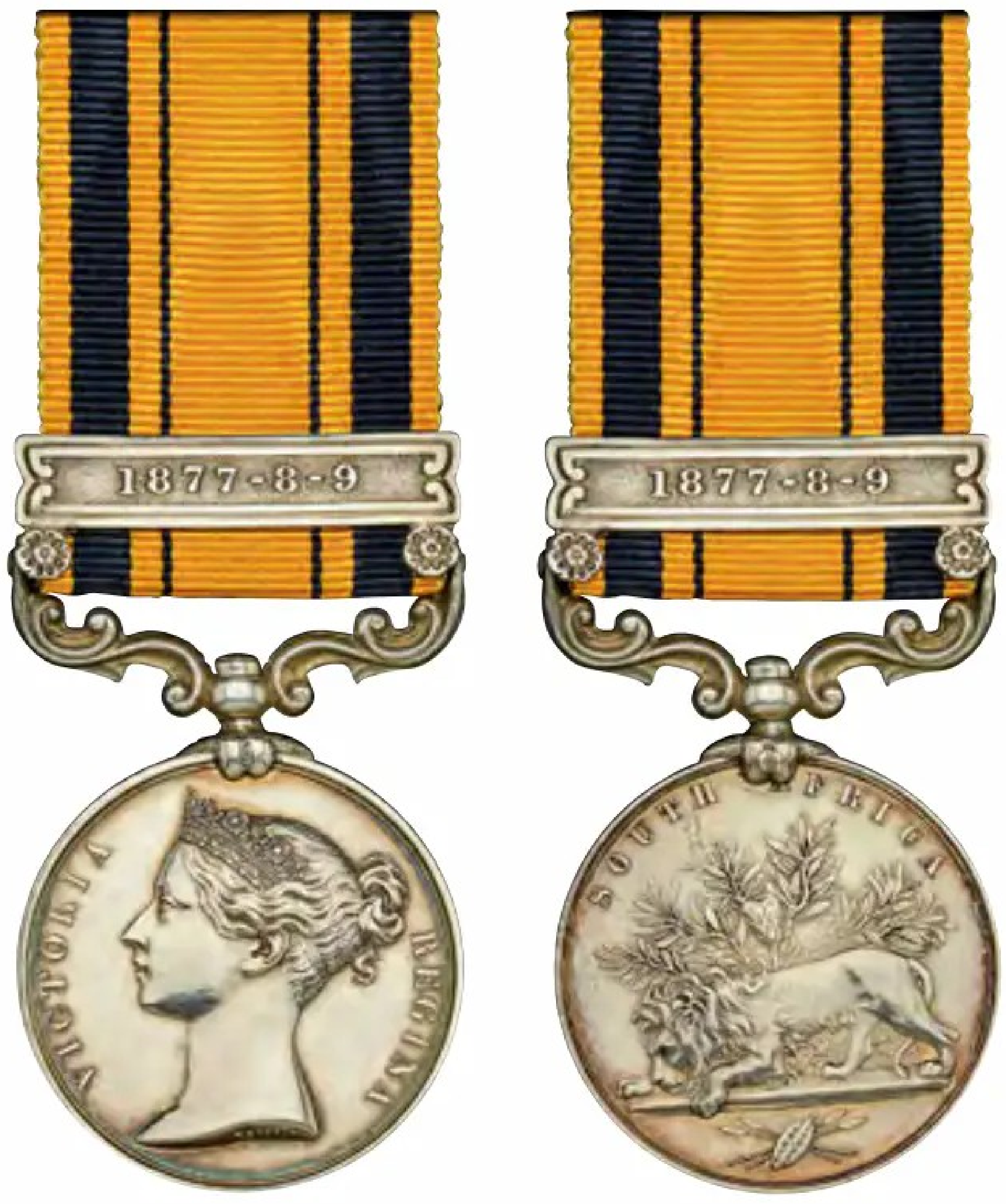
Family tradition held that the soldier went into Longwood House – where Napoleon had been imprisoned – after he died in 1821 and acquired the clasp as a souvenir. Roughly cut leather straps on the reverse support this account. Of note is the almost identical example held by Leven's Hall, reputedly taken from Napoleon's jettisoned cloak at the Battle of Waterloo and presented to the Duke of Wellington by his aide-de-camp.

Napoleon adopted the bee as his personal emblem as he felt it symbolised desirable attributes such as hard work, diligence, industriousness and orderliness. According to legend, the 'bee' never sleeps, so it has also come to represent zeal and vigilance –traits Napoleon claimed to possess. In seeking an emblem, the French emperor had turned to two of his antecedents. The first, Merovingian King Childeric I, was reportedly discovered with 300 gold bees upon his cloak in his tomb. The other, Carolingian Emperor Charlemagne, adopted the cicada as his motif, but Napoleon mistook its outline for a bee.

The artefact doubled its guide price, fetching £12,000 at the Hansons sale.

# RORKE'S DRIFT MEDAL FETCHES £24,000

**A South Africa Medal awarded to a soldier of the 24th Foot present at the battle of Rorke's Drift prompted fierce bidding**



NOONANS

Thomas Lockhart was born in the parish of St Michael, Manchester, and enlisted in Derby with the 25th Brigade in February 1877, aged 19. Joining the 2nd/24th (2nd Warwickshire) Regiment of Foot in Brecon, Lockhart was posted to the Cape of Good Hope, where, from February 1878, he took part in the Kaffir Wars against the Xhosa.

The following year, the private was swept up in the Anglo-Zulu War. On the afternoon of January 22, 1879, just hours after the annihilation of Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Pulleine's column at Isandlwana, 4,000 Zulu warriors descended on the mission station at Rorke's Drift. The garrison, comprising 141 regulars of 'B' Company, 2/24th – including Lockhart – was led by Lieutenants John Chard (Royal Engineers) and Gonville Bromhead. The defenders hastily constructed barricades out of biscuit boxes and mealie bags.

Led by Dabulamanzi kaMpande, the Zulu arrived at Rorke's Drift at 1620hrs and spent the next 12 hours storming the mission station. Their human-wave style assaults were initially unable to penetrate the defences due to accurate volley fire. However, the fighting devolved into fierce hand-to-hand combat. When darkness fell, the defence of the hospital became desperate. The Zulus set fire to the building, stormed it and speared many of the wounded with their iklwa spears; this forced the evacuation of those still inside. Through the night, the garrison held firm. Constant attacks were pushed back and, by 0200hrs, the Zulu assaults began to dwindle. Dawn revealed the cost to the garrison: 14 dead, two dying and eight seriously wounded. At least 351 Zulu lay dead. In recognition of the valour of the 2/24th – and perhaps to draw public attention from Isandlwana – 11 Victoria Crosses were awarded to the garrison, the most received for a single action by one regiment.

In September 1881, Lockhart's career was cut short when he was assaulted "without notice or provocation" by fellow soldiers at Colchester Garrison. A severe blow to his head, causing "a fracture of the orbit and displacement of certain other bones", led to Lockhart developing epilepsy. In 1882, it was decided his disability would "seriously interfere with his powers of supporting himself" and he was found unfit for service. In 1938, the journal of the 24th Foot's successor – the South Wales Borderers – listed Lockhart as alive.

Estimated at £16,000-£20,000, Lockhart's medal smashed its guide, fetching £24,000.

## FORTHCOMING SALES

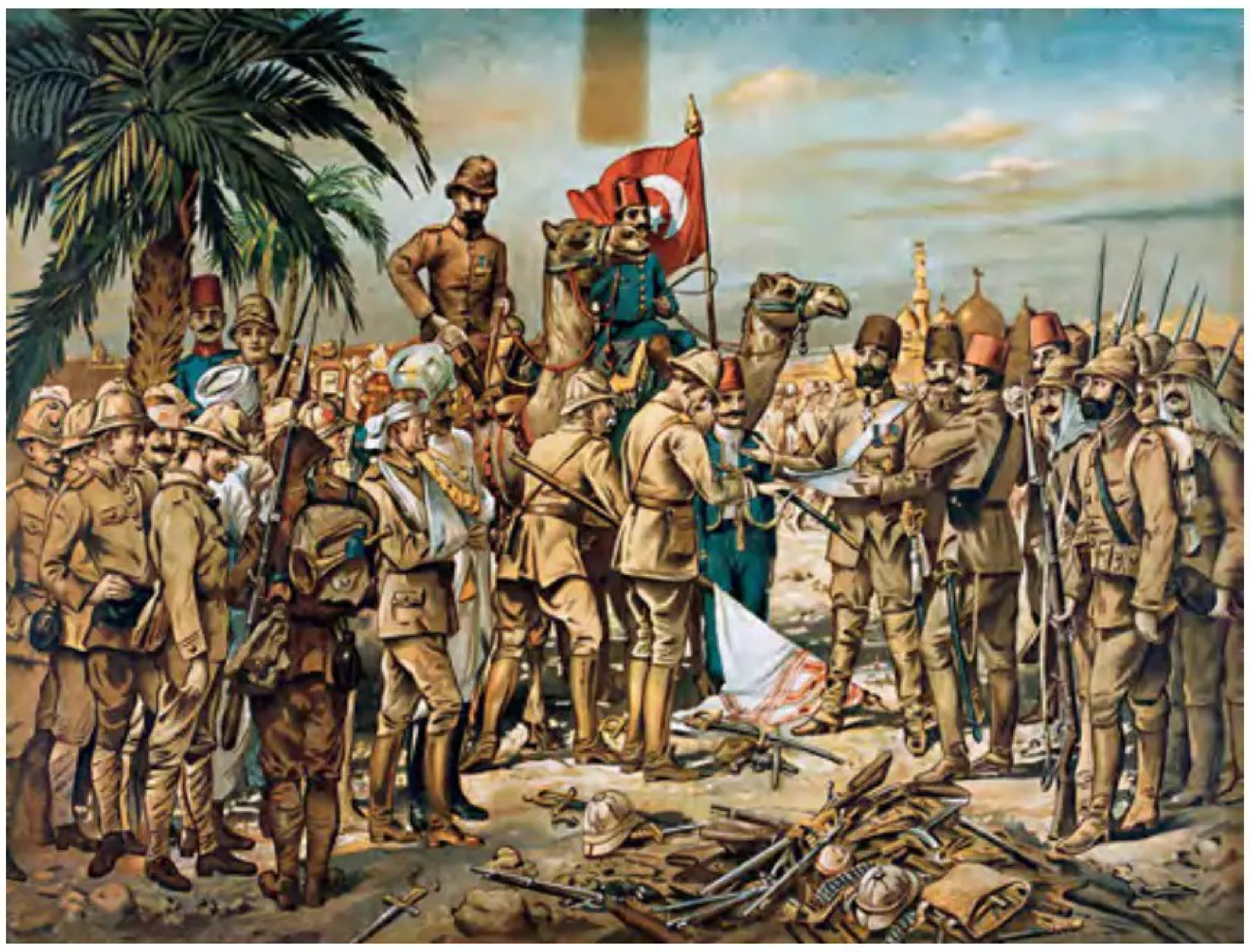
- **Hansons Auctioneers** November 12, 2025
- **Lawrences Auctioneers** November 19 & November 20, 2025 (two sales)
- **Toovey's** November 26, 2025 (two sales)
- **Bishop & Miller** December 3, 2025
- **Noonans** December 3, 2025
- **C&T Auctioneers** December 10, 2025
- **Tennants Auctioneers** December 10, 2025
- **Warwick & Warwick** December 10, 2025
- **Ryedale Auctioneers** December 19, 2025
- **Wilson55** January 28, 2026

*NOTE: Listings include medals, militaria, arms and armour, war art and other historical-themed sales. Dates and catalogues are subject to change. Check websites for details and updates.*

# Debrief

We used Google Trends to find six common questions on **The Siege of Kut**. Now an expert gives informed answers.

THIS MONTH'S HISTORIAN: **TOM BAKER**



**A chromolithograph by an unknown Turkish artist, depicting the Kut garrison's capitulation to the Turks on April 29, 1916** NATIONAL ARMY MUSEUM

## *What strategic objectives did the British have in Mesopotamia, and how did they shape the Siege of Kut?*

Following the Ottoman Empire's decision to enter World War One on the side of the Central Powers, the Indian Expeditionary Force (IEF) was dispatched to the Persian Gulf. In November 1914, this force occupied Basra. London and Delhi saw the potential strategic rewards in capturing the ancient city of Baghdad and General Sir John Nixon, Officer Commanding IEF, ordered the 6th (Poona) Division under Major-General Charles Townshend north. However, the long march took Townshend's force far beyond its logistical base.

After occupying Kut-al-Amara (some 100 miles south of Baghdad) in late 1915, the 6th (Poona) Division was blocked by numerically superior Turkish forces at the Battle of Ctesiphon on November 21. Suffering heavy losses, the survivors pulled back to Kut, with the Ottomans in pursuit. On December 7, 11,000 Turks – increasing to 30,000 as the siege progressed – surrounded the town. The besieged Anglo-Indian garrison comprised 14,586 men.

## *What were the conditions inside Kut and what factors affected the survival rate?*

Conditions within Kut during the 147-day siege from December 1915 to April 1916 were horrific. As of December 7, Townshend's force – plus the 6,500 civilian population of Kut – had just 60 days' worth of food and, by Christmas, all stocks of fresh meat had run out.

Rationing became severe. Initially, British soldiers received 3,600 calories a day, and Indian soldiers 3,100. By January, calorie intake was reduced by a quarter. Soldiers and civilians alike began to suffer from progressive malnutrition, even after the garrison's mules and horses were slaughtered for meat. As a result, starvation became frequent and triggered outbreaks of scurvy, beriberi and jaundice.

The climate also had an impact on the survival rate. Most of the garrison was billeted in trenches and, over winter, temperatures plunged below freezing. The cold was intensified by high winds and rainstorms and the men's trenches often became flooded. Diseases including dysentery, cholera and pneumonia became extremely common, and when temperatures increased in late February, malaria became frequent too. By March 1916, a combination of starvation and rampant disease resulted in some 80 soldiers and civilians dying per day.

## *How significant were the Royal Flying Corps' aerial resupply operations?*

The Royal Flying Corps (RFC) mounted the first deliberate air resupply in history to provision the besieged garrison between April 15-29, 1916. On March 27, following an urgent appeal for supplies from Townshend, 30 Squadron RFC carried out a test drop, delivering 70lb of supplies via parachute. Following this, the Major-General requested 5,000lb of supplies each day, which comprised flour, sugar, chocolate, salt and ghee (clarified butter).

Nine aircraft flew out from the airfield at Ora, some 25 miles from Kut. The aerial resupply effort commenced on April 15.

From then until the end of the siege a fortnight later, 140 sorties were conducted, delivering 16,800lb of foodstuffs. This equated to 1,600lb per day, but this was just 22% of the garrison's daily requirements. Townshend would later describe the effort as "a complete failure".

## What attempts were made by the British to relieve the Kut garrison?

Between January and April 1916, four major attempts were made to break the Siege of Kut, all of which failed.

The first, launched on January 6, saw Lieutenant-General Sir Fenton Aylmer's Tigris Corps – comprising 9,900 infantry, 1,340 cavalry, 42 guns and four gunboats – advance from Ali Al Gharbi. After two days of fighting 3½ miles east of Sheikh Sa'ad, the British suffered 1,962 dead and 2,300 wounded. Reinforced, the Ottomans withdrew 6 miles to a new defensive line along the Wadi, a tributary of the great Tigris River.

On January 13, Aylmer attacked the Wadi positions, but he sustained 1,600 casualties in the effort. A week later, at Hanna, British troops again attempted to break through the flank of the Wadi, but lost 2,700 men crossing 600 yards of flooded no-mans-land, before retreating back to Ali Al Gharbi.

After a month-long pause, reinforcements raised Alymer's strength to 19,000 men and the general resumed the advance to relieve Kut, deciding to force a breakthrough via the Dujaila Redoubt on March 8. The assault failed, resulting in 4,000 casualties in a single day.

In early April, Aylmer's successor, Lieutenant-General Sir George Gorringe, attacked with a reinforced corps consisting of some 30,000 men, which was roughly equivalent to the size of the Ottoman 6th Army besieging Kut. Fallahiyeh and Beit Isa briefly fell, before Ottoman counter-attacks restored the line. At the Attack on Sannaiyat on April 22, repeated British assaults failed to breach the defences or rout the Ottomans and the British suffered 1,200 casualties.

In total, the four relief operations generated at least 30,000 British and Indian casualties, while Ottoman losses were far lighter. Despite the British advancing to within 20 miles of Kut and its beleaguered garrison and residents, the Ottoman siege lines were never broken.

## What was the fate of the Kut garrison after they had surrendered?

General Townshend surrendered the Kut garrison to the Turks on April 29, 1916, with 13,309 men – 277 British officers, 204 Indian officers, 2,592 British other ranks and 6,988 Indian other ranks – marched into captivity. It was the largest capitulation of British-led forces since the Siege of Yorktown in October 1781, and until the Fall of Singapore in February 1942 the largest surrender in British military history

Aside from Townshend, who was treated well, the consequences for the captives were dire. The men were marched into Anatolia – a journey of some 620 miles. On the first stage, a gruelling trek to Mosul, the POWs were provided with little food or provision for medical care, and no transport was provided for the sick and wounded. Estimates suggest that as many as 4,000 British and Indian troops died.

Those who survived to make it to the POW camps found that conditions in captivity were little better, with many men forced to labour on construction projects including the Berlin-Baghdad railway. Of the total British POWs, 70% died while incarcerated. The Indians fared better, but still suffered more than 1,000 dead while in captivity.

## What were the long-term consequences of the defeat at Kut?

The disaster at Kut forced a reassessment of Britain's efforts in Mesopotamia. The first was the instigation of the Special Commissions (Dardanelles and Mesopotamia) Act 1916, which reported systemic failings in medical care, command and control, logistics and administrative arrangements. General Sir John Nixon was heavily criticised for his decision to advance on Baghdad and was subsequently relieved of command.

His replacement, General Sir Frederick Maude, set about improving the situation in Mesopotamia. New roads capable of sustaining heavier and more frequent use were built around Basra, alongside rest camps and supply dumps along the British lines of communication, while 1,300 extra river steamers and hospital barges were put into service, with medical provision in the theatre increased by 20,000 beds. Troop numbers in the theatre also swelled to more than 400,000 by 1917. Doctrinally, Maude concentrated on slow, deliberate advances steered by proper reconnoitring and supported by artillery. These efforts allowed the British Indian Army to retake Kut in February 1917, and Baghdad fell on March 11. BW

**Major-General Charles Townshend, who commanded the Kut garrison** TURKISH ARMY

# Field Post

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## Distinguished aviator

In Tom Spencer's article on Royal Navy pilots who participated in the Battle of Britain (*The Dark Blue Few*, *BAW*, October 2025), a photograph showed a Sea Gladiator with Sub Lieutenant Sleigh in the cockpit.

'Jimmy' Sleigh served throughout the war and became one of the most decorated pilots in the Fleet Air Arm. He was the father-in-law of a friend of my wife, and, through her, I was able to correspond with him. Readers might be interested in a resumé of his career.

Lieutenant J W Sleigh (cent) CO 890 NAS, with pilots at Norfolk, Virginia, in June 1942
ANDREW THOMAS

Born and educated in South Africa, Sleigh joined the navy as a regular officer in 1936 and later trained as a pilot, flying Sea Gladiators with 804 NAS. He later served in 802 NAS (alongside 'Winkle' Brown), flying Martlets on HMS *Audacity*. He escorted convoys to Gibraltar and, on September 22, 1941, shot down a Fw 200 Condor. He survived the sinking of *Audacity* two nights later and soon after was awarded the DSC. He then joined the RN Fighter School as an instructor, but in May 1942 moved to Norfolk, Virginia, where he became the first CO of 890 NAS, which was initially issued with USN F4F-3 Wildcats. He remained as CO until late 1943, taking his squadron to sea with HMS *Illustrious*, during which time they supported the invasion of Italy, for which he was Mentioned in Despatches.

He was then given a staff post and was intimately involved in the planning of Operation Tungsten, the carrier strike on *Tirpitz*. In March 1944, as a Lieutenant-Commander, he transferred temporarily to the escort carrier *Pursuer*, where he flew Wildcats with 881 NAS and led the anti-flak suppression effort during the Tungsten strike, for which he received the DSO. He then joined the 4th Naval Fighter Wing aboard HMS *Searcher*, dive-bombing a radar site on Crete – the last of his varied operations flying Wildcats.

Sleigh remained in the navy post-war and, among other things served on the carrier *Glory* as Commander (Air), flying operations above Korea in Fireflys and Sea Furys, for which he received the OBE. He retired from the Royal Navy in 1958, returning to his native South Africa, where he joined the hydrographic staff of the South African Navy, until finally retiring in 1981. He died in 2005, aged 88.

**Andrew Thomas**

## Memory lane

In the excellent *Rescue or recce* feature (*BAW*, October 2025) my eye caught the box about Pilot Officer 'Nobby' Clarke and his Blackburn Roc. This sparked a trip down memory lane.

Many people of a certain age will recall the pleasure and excitement of reading articles in the old *RAF Flying Review* by Squadron Leader DH Clarke – the one and the same 'Nobby' Clarke. He penned a long-running series entitled *What were they like to fly?* (later published as a book) that were very personal reflections of aircraft he had flown, sometimes just a single trip.

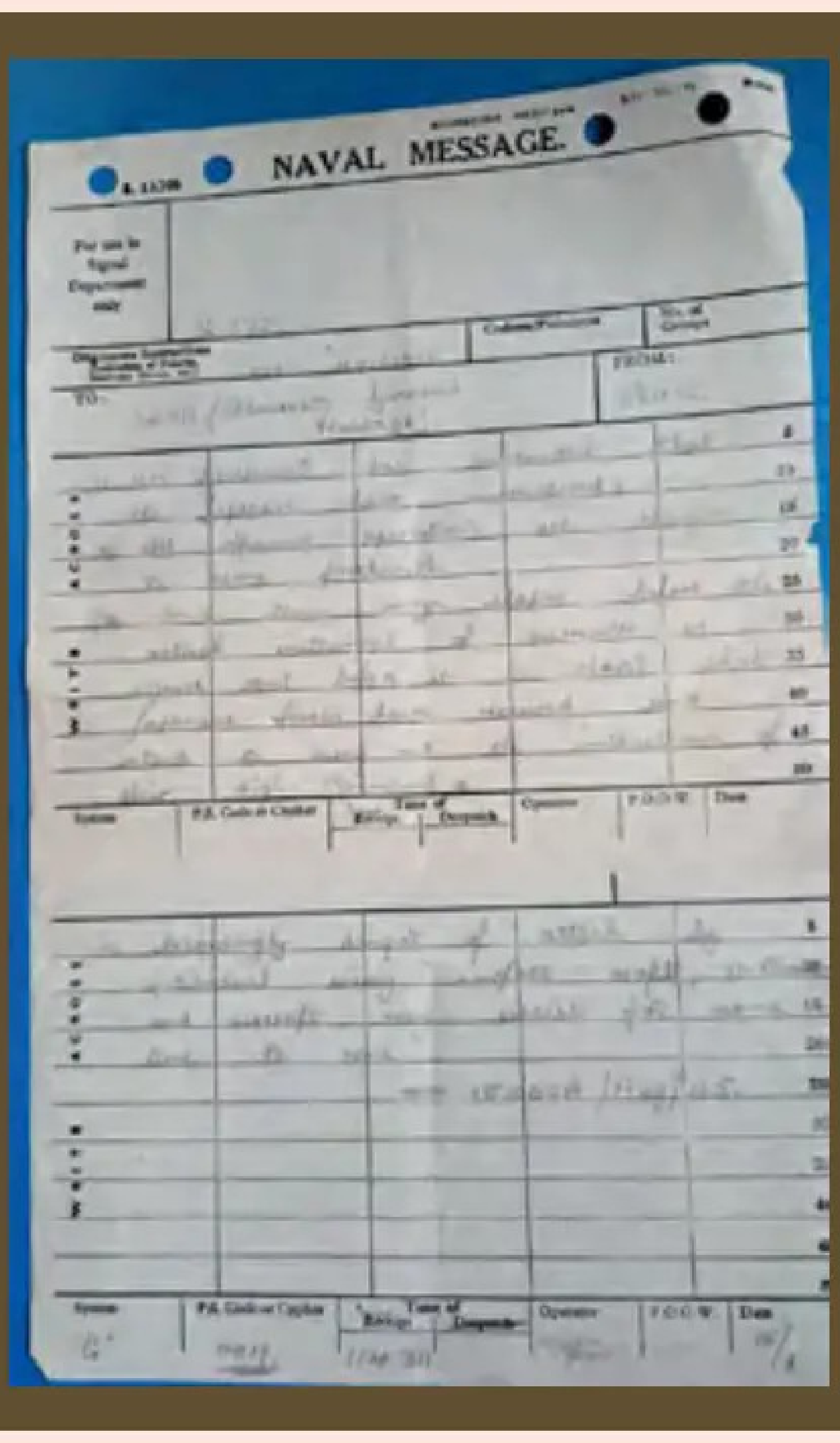
I do recall one article about flying the Kittyhawk in the desert with 250 (Sudan) Squadron, on which he had painted a distinctive 'Saint' marking; I have been told that he also put it on a captured Italian Fiat G-50 he flew.

In his articles, Nobby came across as something of a character and certainly held a young boy enthralled! What happy (and quite innocent) days. Thanks for the memories!

**John Green**

## Admiralty alert

My father, Eric Wiltshire, was a signaller in the Castle-class corvette HMS *Knaresborough Castle* when, in August 1945, the announcement of the Japanese surrender was sent to all naval vessels. He made a second copy of that message, which I have in my possession. I've attached a photo of the document and I hope this transcript will be of some interest:


NAVAL MESSAGE.

"G.372 [MOST IMMEDIATE] TO: 242A (Admiralty General Message) FROM: ADMTY

(1) His Majesty's Government has announced that the Japanese have surrendered STOP

(2) All offensive operations are therefore to cease forthwith STOP

(3) Some time may elapse before the actual instrument of surrender is signed and before it is clear that Japanese forces have received and intended to carry out the instructions of their High Command STOP

(4) Accordingly, danger of attack by individual enemy surface craft, U-boats and aircraft may persist for some time to come STOP

151000A/Aug/45"

**Martin Wiltshire**

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# Clipping

The He 177 'Greif', Germany's sole heavy bomber, had the range, speed and potential punch to pose a serious threat to convoys. However, as **Chris Goss** reveals, only once were Fleet Air Arm fighters forced to respond to this new threat

**Artist's impression of Sub Lieutenant Lawrie Brander's attack on Major Walter Rieder's He 177** ANTONIS KARIDIS

# the Griffin's wings

In August 1940, taking advantage of former French bases along that country's coast, the Luftwaffe began long-range sorties into the Atlantic. Aiming to report the progress of convoys for roving U-boats or to attack vulnerable ships directly, its main maritime patrol aircraft was the Focke Wulf Fw 200 Condor, and the type almost immediately made its mark.

The converted airliners posed a considerable threat, their range having been demonstrated in August 1938 when a Condor became the first heavier-than-air craft to fly from Berlin to New York non-stop – about 4,000 miles. With its endurance and reasonable capacity for bombs and other anti-ship weapons, the Condor quickly became the 'Scourge of the Atlantic'. However, with increasingly tired airframes, mounting losses against Allied carrier aircraft and diminishing effectiveness, from 1943 the Condor was gradually withdrawn.

It was expected to be replaced in the maritime patrol role by one of two aircraft: the radar-equipped Junkers Ju 290, a larger, faster converted airliner, or the He 177 Greif (Griffin), Germany's sole operational heavy bomber type.

## The 'Luftwaffe's lighter'

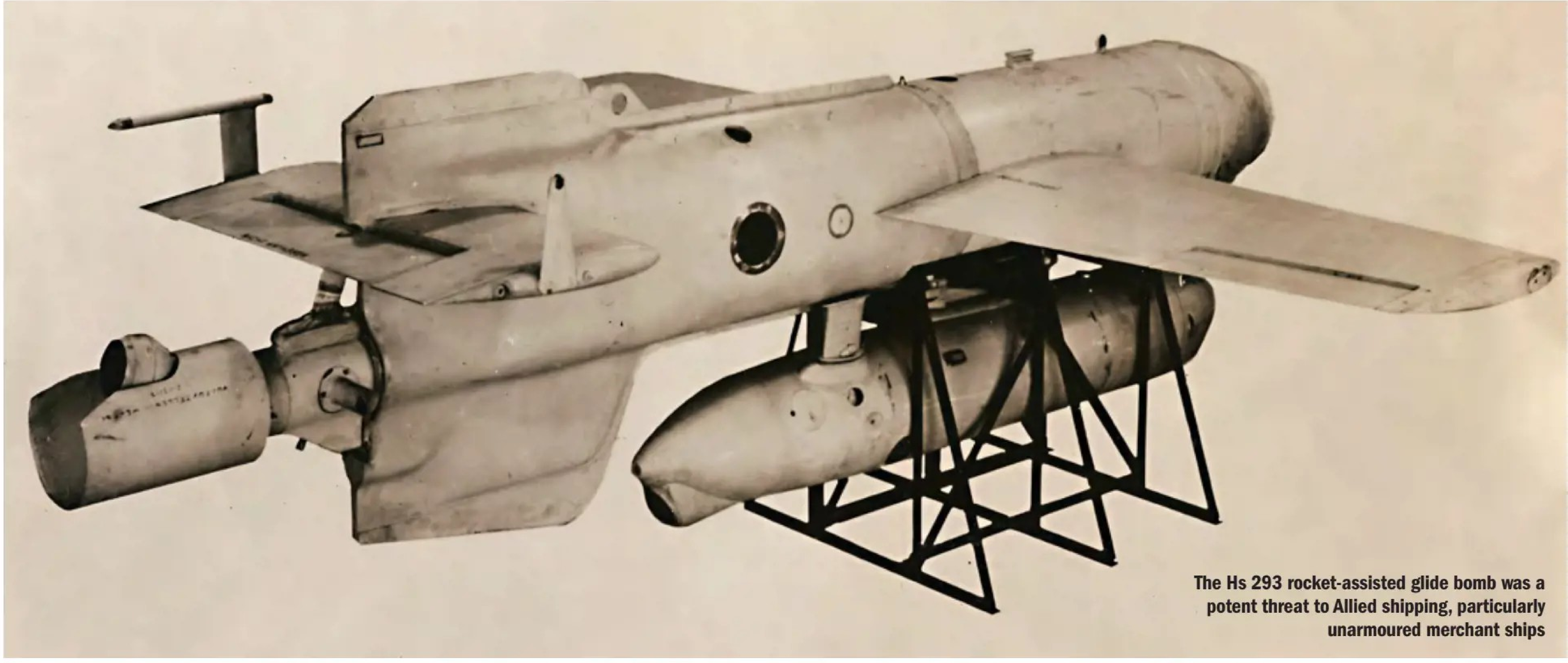
On paper, the He 177 appeared an effective machine. Slightly smaller than the Condor, it could carry an equally useful weapons load, including bombs, the steerable Fritz X glide bomb and the rocket-assisted Hs 293 glide bomb. Powered by coupled Daimler-Benz DB 610 'doppelmotor' engines, the aircraft's four engines span two four-blade props and it was considerably faster, able to fly higher and boasted an impressive baseline range and endurance over the Condor.

However, in reality, the type was plagued by major issues. Even after its delayed arrival into service, its tendency to catch fire led to the less than inspiring 'flaming coffin' moniker or its 'Luftwaffenfeuerzeug' (Luftwaffe's lighter) nickname.

The first prototype was expected to fly in 1938, but numerous faults necessitated a redesign – not helped by interference from senior German leaders, who questioned the need for a heavy/strategic bomber. The Luftwaffe insisted the bomber's range and ceiling be increased and that it also be capable of dive bombing, meaning the fuselage had to be strengthened. These more demanding requirements necessitated a more capable powerplant to achieve the specified range, speed and altitude. Two engines were coupled together and linked to a single airscrew – though the intended

The second pre-production Heinkel He 177A-02 Greif in flight NARA

The He 177 was plagued with problems and was fully operational for just nine months IMAGES VIA CHRIS GOSS UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED


The Hs 293 rocket-assisted glide bomb was a potent threat to Allied shipping, particularly unarmoured merchant ships

He 177s of II./KG 30 equipped with Hs 293s at Bordeaux, 1944

*"The He 177 appeared an effective machine – considerably faster, able to fly higher and boasting an impressive baseline range and endurance over the Condor – but in reality was plagued by issues and its tendency to catch fire"*

Daimler Benz DB 606 pairing engine was still being tested and eventually the DB 610 was used instead. Finally, the He 177 suffered from persistent problems with its tail, as well as excessive vibration.

Construction and refinement continued through 1939, with the Luftwaffe ordering 800 aircraft for delivery by April 1943 even before the initial prototype flew. The aircraft took its first 20-minute flight on November 9, 1939, but this and subsequent tests revealed myriad problems, including the crashes of two prototypes.

It was not until February 1941 that the first operational trials flight was flown, and it was August when the first pre-production aircraft began testing. Engine failures, delivery delays, major component shortages and accidents plagued the He 177 and it was not until early 1942 that these were somewhat resolved. Then, as testing continued, piston con-rod breakages were causing holes in the crank cases, enabling oil to leak that would then catch fire. Once the original aluminium rivets were replaced with harder duralumin ones, this problem was solved, but then manufacturing faults in the propeller pitch change mechanism were found that, again, could result in fires.

## Mediterranean mauling

The end result was that a bomber the Luftwaffe expected in 1938/39 did not arrive until mid-1942. Even then, significant problems persisted. The engines ran so hot that the unique evaporative cooling system used was insufficient and radiators had to be fitted, which increased drag, therefore requiring more power from the engines. The aircraft weight also grew and, as a result, top speed dropped to just over 280mph.

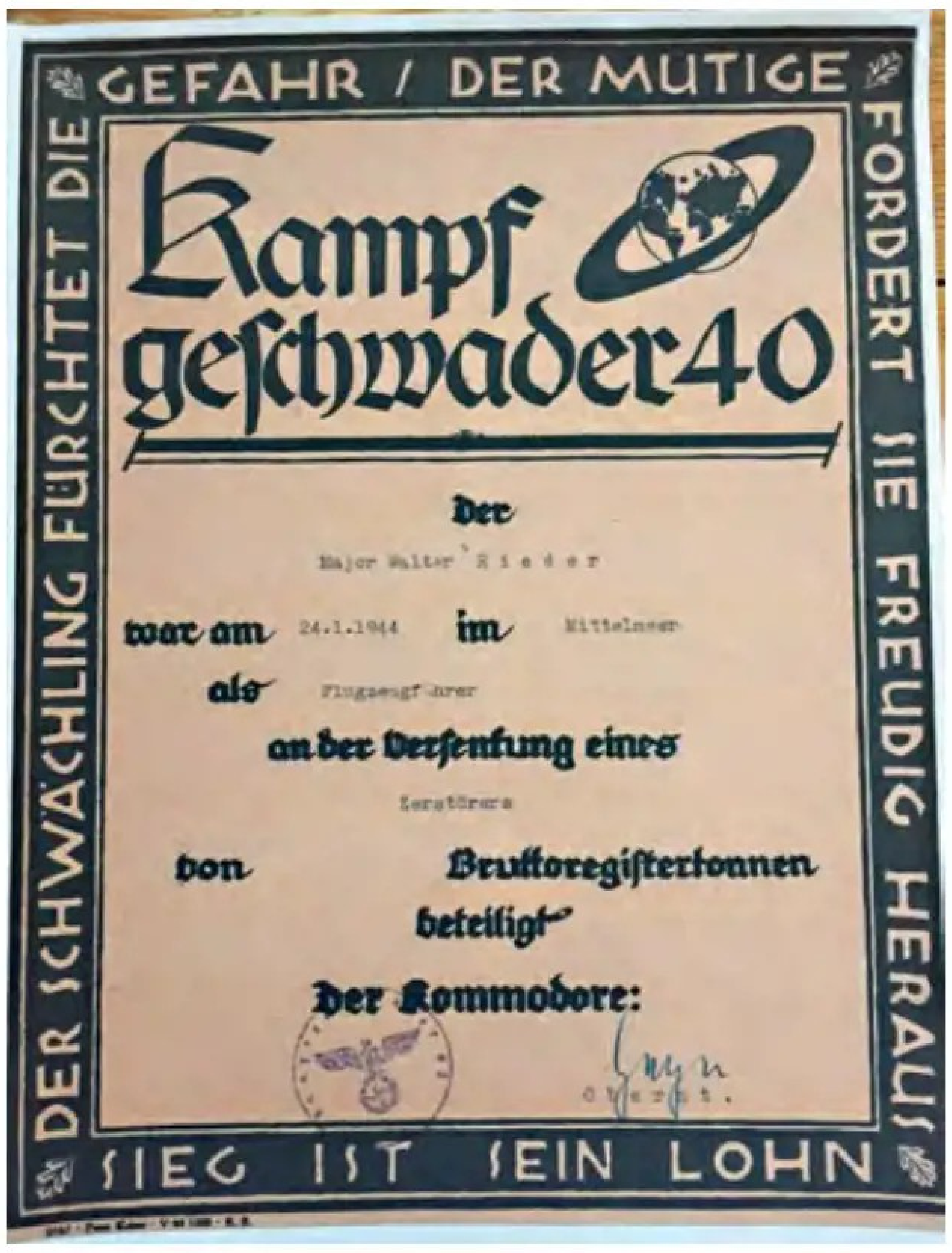
Despite this, the He 177 was still intended to be a launch aircraft for the Henschel Hs 293 anti-ship glide bomb. The Hs 293 carried a 660lb warhead and a small rocket motor accelerated it to about 375mph. After 12 seconds the motor cut out and the bomb coasted towards its target in a shallow dive, guided by the observer from the launch aircraft, who was assisted by a small flare in the bomb's tail.

Despite more than 1,000 He 177s being built, attrition and losses were high and encounters with Allied aircraft were therefore uncommon. The first unit to go into action with He 177s carrying Hs 293s was II Gruppe/Kampfgeschwader 40 (II./KG 40), commanded by Major Rudolf Mons and based at Bordeaux-Mérignac in southwest France. The first operational sortie came on November 21, 1943, when a convoy was attacked over the Atlantic, but II./KG 40 lost three aircraft and four more were damaged. Five days later, off the North African coast, eight He 177s – including that flown by Mons – were lost. Command of II./KG 40 then went to Hauptman Walter Rieder.

Rieder was an experienced maritime pilot, having originally flown He 115s with 3./Küstenfliegergruppe 506. His 8./KG 40 had begun converting from the Fw 200 to the Greif in March 1943, before, in August, he took command of the Fw 200-equipped III./KG 40. Because of his He 177 experience, Rieder moved to take over II./KG 40, but his time in command would be short.

Major Walter Rieder inherited command of II./KG 40 in November 1943

Due to the losses suffered in November 1943, II./KG 40 flew few missions until January 1944, when it operated against the Anzio landings. However, the Gruppe's participation was brief and losses were incurred. The unit's Italian sojourn might have seemed all negative but for a recently promoted Major Rieder's claims for destroyer and a 5,000-tonne transport on January 24, and a 3,000-tonne freighter on January 26 – though the only shipping casualties were a near miss by two Hs 293s against the destroyer USS *Plunkett* and the loss of the hospital ship HMHS St *David* on January 24, and the liberty ships *Hilary* A *Herbert* and *John Barnard* on January 26.



DER SCHWÄCHLING FÜRCHTET DIE GEFAHR / DER MUTIGE FORDERT SIE FREUDIG HERAUS

Kampf geſchwader 40

Der

Major Walter Rieder

war am 24.1.1944 im Mittelmeer

als Flugzeugführer

an der Verſenkung eines

Zerstörers

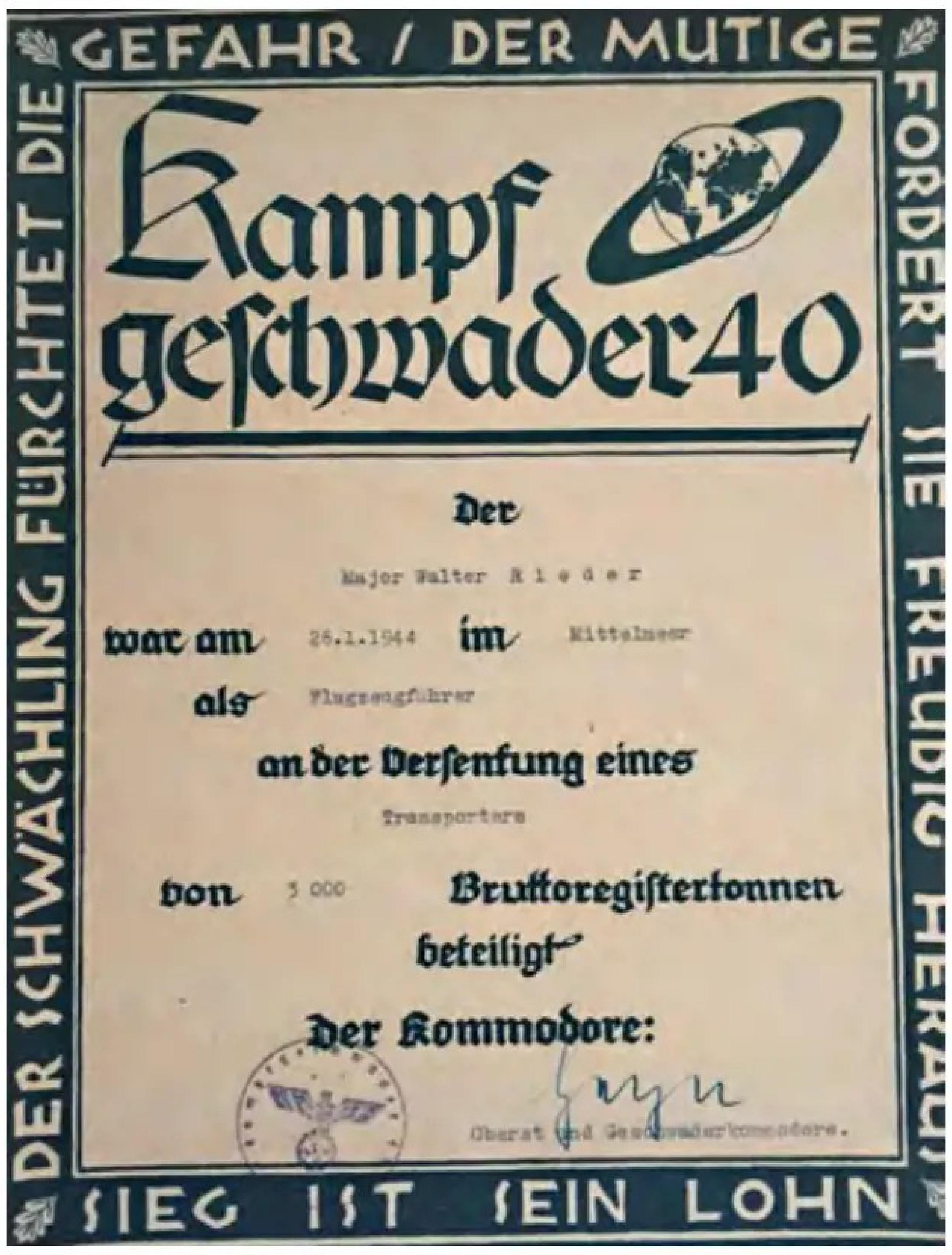
von Bruttoregiſtertonnen

beteiligt

Der Kommodore:

Oberst.

SIEG IST SEIN LOHN



DER SCHWÄCHLING FÜRCHTET DIE GEFAHR / DER MUTIGE FORDERT SIE FREUDIG HERAUS

Kampf geſchwader 40

Der

Major Walter Rieder

war am 26.1.1944 im Mittelmeer

als Flugzeugführer

an der Verſenkung eines

Transporters

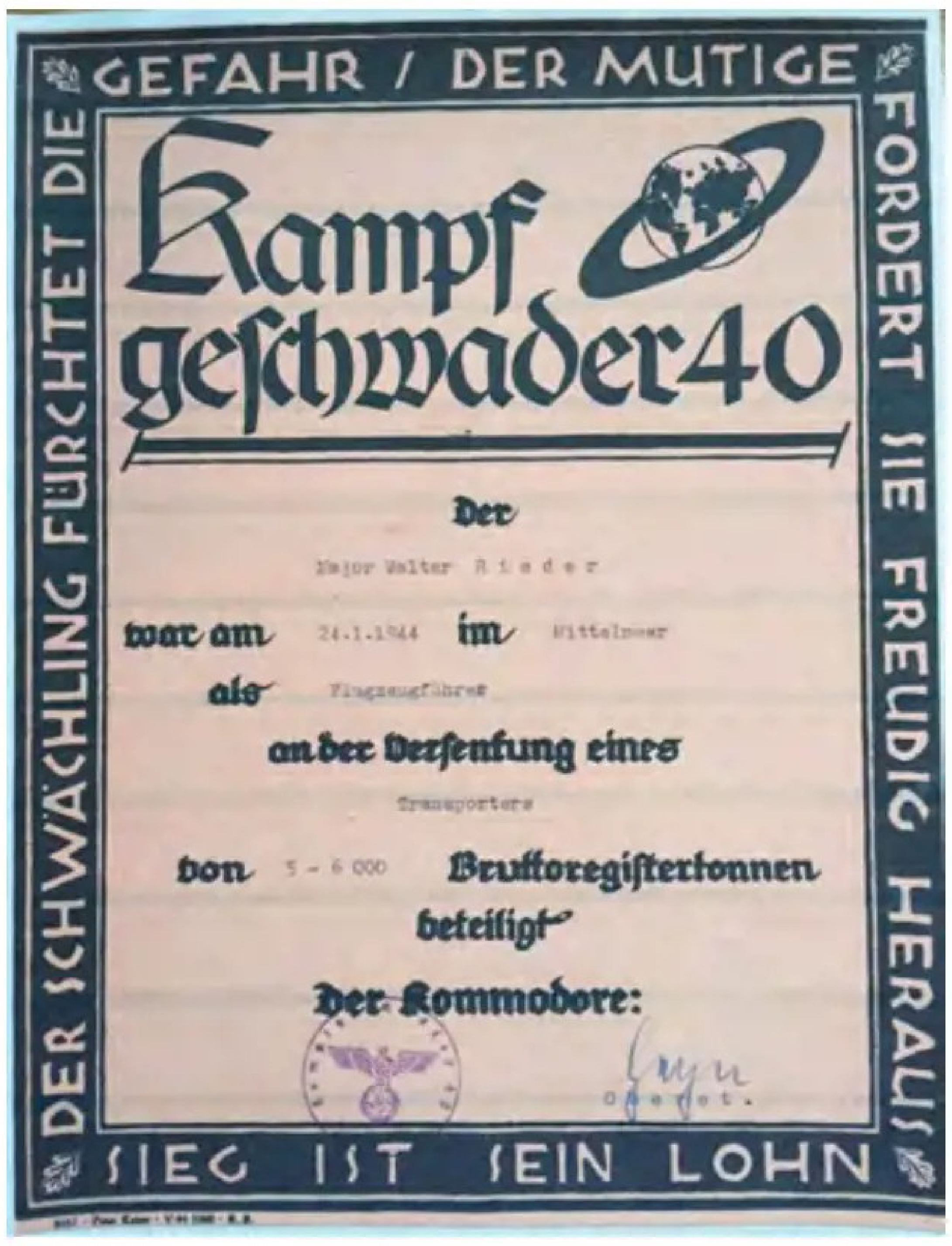
von 5 000 Bruttoregiſtertonnen

beteiligt

Der Kommodore:

Oberst und Geschwaderkommodore.

SIEG IST SEIN LOHN



DER SCHWÄCHLING FÜRCHTET DIE GEFAHR / DER MUTIGE FORDERT SIE FREUDIG HERAUS

Kampf geſchwader 40

Der

Major Walter Rieder

war am 24.1.1944 im Mittelmeer

als Flugzeugführer

an der Verſenkung eines

Transporters

von 5 - 6 000 Bruttoregiſtertonnen

beteiligt

Der Kommodore:

Oberst.

SIEG IST SEIN LOHN

**A trio of certificates awarded to Walter Rieder for attacking ships at Anzio**

## Hostile reception

On February 12, 1944, II./KG 40's attention switched to the Bay of Biscay. Making its passage of the area was the 60-ship OS 67/KMS 41 convoy, heading from Liverpool to Gibraltar, where it would split, with the continuing vessels bound for Freetown in Sierra Leone. The escort included the carrier HMS *Pursuer*, which carried two squadrons of Grumman Wildcat Mk.V fighters. OS 67/KMS 41 had been spotted at 1054hrs about 400 miles west of Cape Finisterre by a Ju 290 of 2./Fernaufklärungsgruppe 5 commanded by Oberleutnant Otto-Karl Kremser, who was ordered to shadow it for nearly nine hours.

That afternoon, seven He 177s from II./KG 40 and 11 Fw 200s of III./KG 40 took off from Bordeaux-Mérignac armed with Hs 293s. The slower Condors took off first, starting 1430hrs, but were intercepted by Mosquitos of 157 Squadron, which shot down the Condor flown by Feldwebel Karl-Heinz Schairer of 7./KG 40 and damaged two more from Stab III and 9./KG 40.

One of the Condors was flown by Oberleutnant Günther Seide of Stab III./KG 40, and crewman Unteroffizier Werner Zerrahn remembered: "We had taken off with about five or six aircraft, and on our way out we spotted some twin-engine aeroplanes starboard ahead, assuming it would be our own escort of Ju 88s. However, these planes took an attacking position by flying a steep turn and we realised they were enemy aircraft. We were only attacked once and escaped with minor damage. I suffered a bullet graze to my left foot and Feldwebel Günther Hickmann, in another aircraft, was shot through the left hand. Back on the ground, we found that we had a lot of luck because we counted 130 bullet holes in our Condor."

**HMS *Pursuer* was an escort carrier transferred to the British on June 14, 1943** NIKKI WOOD

**The Wildcat was a Lend-Lease carrier fighter known to the British as the Marlet Mk.I, II and III, with later variants designated the Wildcat Mk.IV, V and VI**

They had been lucky indeed, having been intercepted by three Mosquitos on an Instep patrol. Flight Lieutenants Dick 'Dolly' Doleman, Brian Whitlock and Flying Officer Verdun Hannawin each claimed the Condor flown by Feldwebel Karl-Heinz Schairer of 7./KG 40, which was reported missing. Zerrahn was probably wounded by Hannawin.

The RAF's report of the action reveals the one-sided combat: "Flight Lieutenant Doleman sighted aircraft on the starboard beam about four miles away and the three Mosquitos turned starboard towards them. The a/c were seen to be five Fw 200s – four in V formation and one straggling – flying at 0ft.

"[Our] aircraft attacked from starboard, line astern, each opening fire at about 900yds closing to 600yds. Strikes were scored on at least one enemy, the last of the starboard side of the V. Doleman broke away to port, the other two to starboard. Doleman and Flying Officer Hannawin reformed and attacked again from the starboard quarter. Doleman attacked, the inner starboard engine of the enemy damaged in the first attack caught fire and fire also broke out on the starboard side of the fuselage. When Hannawin attacked, the flames spread all over the wing. The enemy aircraft did a gentle turn to starboard, lost height, hit the sea and blew up. Hannawin made two more attacks on the remaining four enemies before setting course for base."

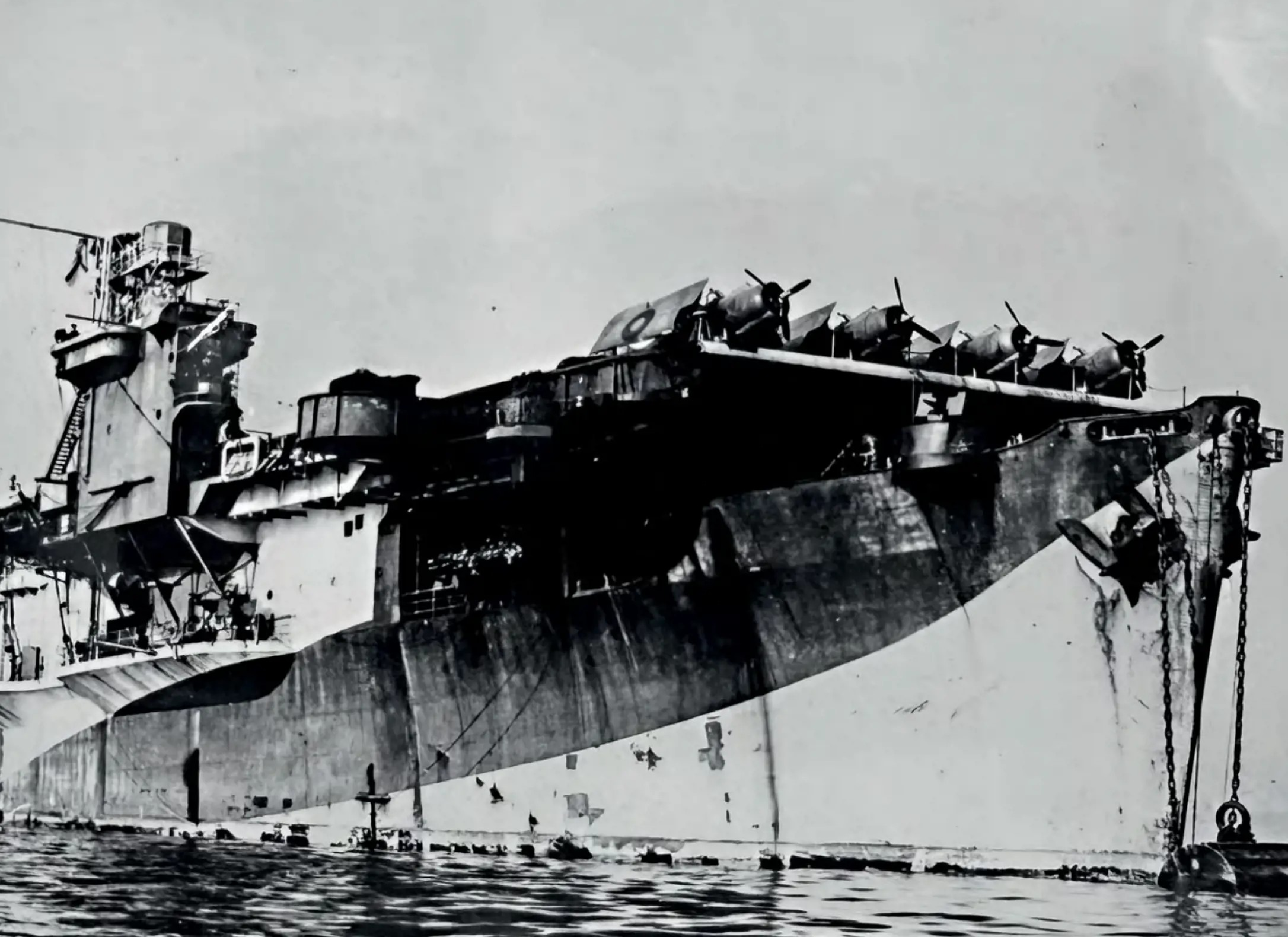
Naval aviator Digby Cosh

## Ball of fire

The convoy was alert to further attacks and, at 2012hrs, four 881 Naval Air Squadron Wildcats scrambled from *Pursuer*. These were flown by Lieutenant-Commander Digby 'Dagwood' Cosh, Lieutenant Hank Wilson and Sub Lieutenants Lawrie Brander and Norman Turner.

*"The inner starboard engine of the enemy damaged in the first attack caught fire, and fire also broke out on the starboard side of the fuselage. When Hannawin attacked, the flames spread all over the wing"*

RAF AFTER-ACTION REPORT



The BV 138 shot down by a 404 Squadron Beaufighter during the diversionary attacks in Norway

Digby Cosh was born in London on September 11, 1918, but his family soon moved to Canada. He attended Lisgar Collegiate Institute in Ottawa, after which he attended the Royal Military College until the outbreak of war, when he was commissioned as a sub lieutenant. In April 1941, he wrote to the CO of HMCS *Niobe*, Captain Cuthbert Taylor, requesting he be considered for pilot training. Taylor wrote to Canada House, stating: "This application is strongly recommended. During the short period under my command, this officer has shown resource, initiative and courage under active service conditions that should prove a valuable asset to an officer in the Fleet Air Arm." Digby began flying training in August 1941 and was assessed to be a suitable fighter pilot. He was posted to 892 NAS at Norfolk, Virginia, in July 1942 and then to 890 NAS at Norfolk two months later.

In July 1943, Lieutenant Cosh embarked on HMS *Illustrious*. The fleet carrier, together with two battleships and other vessels, joined Operation Governor, the Anglo-American effort to simulate an attack on Norway, thus drawing out *Tirpitz* and directing German attention away from Sicily. Successful in attracting attention, BV 138 flying boats based at Trondheim got airborne overnight on July 27, returning five hours later. The following day, the BV 138s took off again, but were met by Wildcats flown by Digby and Lieutenant J Lowder. Digby downed one, while two more were shot down by a 404 Squadron Beaufighter. In all, five of the flying boats were lost that day.

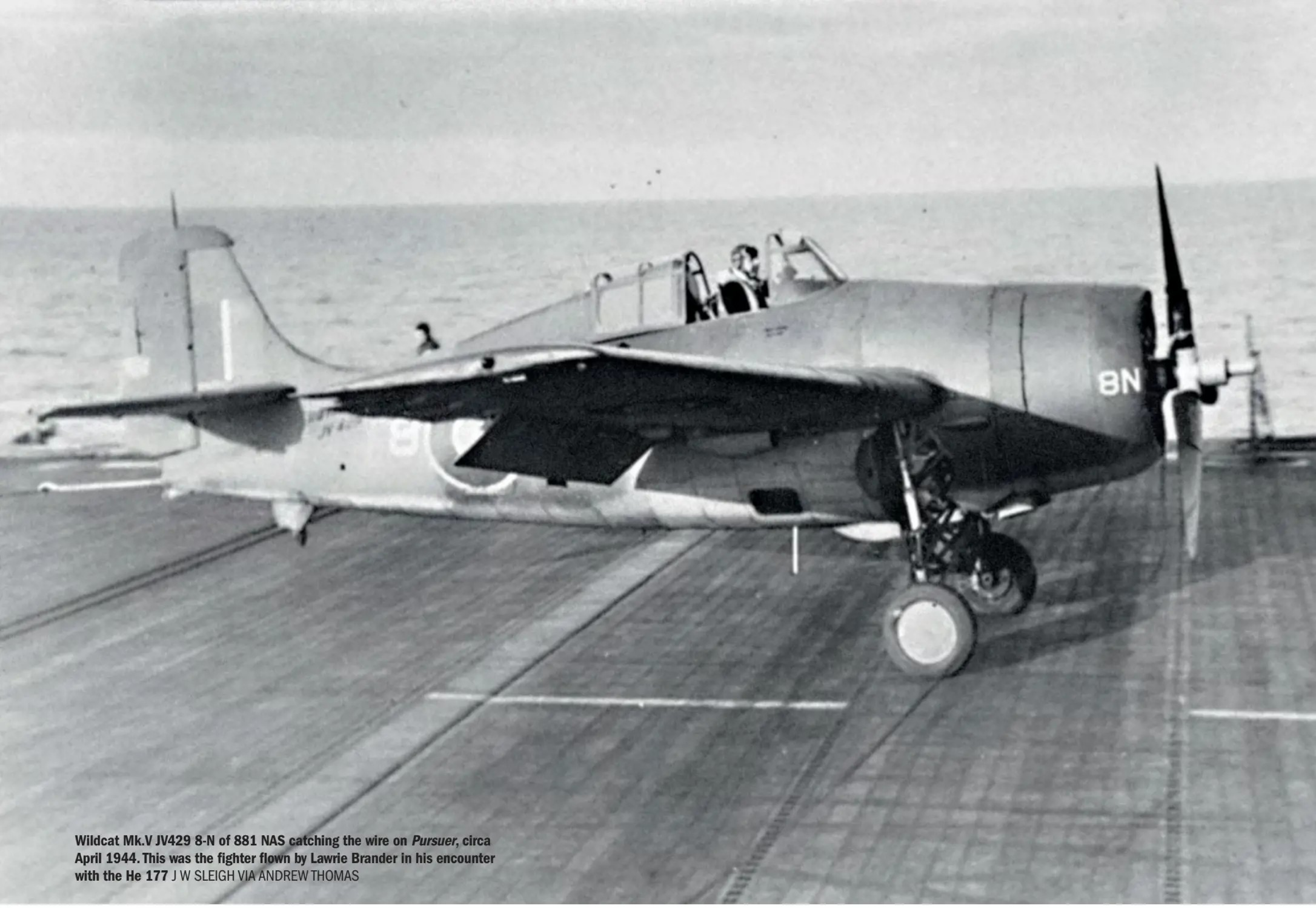
In November 1943, Cosh was appointed to command of 881 NAS and embarked on *Pursuer* at the end of the month. Weeks later, on February 12, 1944, Cosh led Wilson, Brander and Turner against the aerial threat approaching OS 67/KMS 41.

Norman Turner remembered: "The convoy was warned of a possible attack by the new Heinkel guided-missile bombers. Dagwood and Hank were catapulted off to intercept a shadower, and Hank fired off a few rounds at a Condor but lost it in cloud. Radar picked up bandits as the sun was going down over the horizon. Lawrie and I were walking on the flight deck when Dagwood yelled 'They are coming!' We dashed for our gear and were catapulted off after Dagwood and Hank, course 092°. I picked up Dagwood and joined him. A climb to about 6,000ft and suddenly there was an explosion and a ball of fire – Lawrie had blown one up!

"I spotted an outline, called out 'Bandit!' to Dagwood and dived on it. The defensive fire was strong, so I dived underneath and fired from below. The rear and mid-upper gunners shut up, but the enemy disappeared into cloud and I lost them."

Lawrie Brander later recounted his brush with an He 177: "We were still heading

Wildcat's of 881 NAS take-off from *Pursuer*



**Wildcat Mk.V JV429 8-N of 881 NAS catching the wire on *Pursuer*, circa April 1944. This was the fighter flown by Lawrie Brander in his encounter with the He 177** J W SLEIGH VIA ANDREW THOMAS

> ***"One ring deflection, not a word of complaint the from the rear gunner. When I was nearly astern, a parachute opened, and the thing blew up – both were too close for comfort"***
>
> SUB LIEUTENANT LAWRIE BRANDER, 881 NAS

**Lieutenant Wilson (second left), Lieutenant-Commander Cosh and Sub Lieutenants Turner and Brander congratulated by Lieutenant-Commander Oliphant (Commander Air, *Pursuer*) on their success, February 12, 1944** M SANDERSON VIA ANDREW THOMAS

east, but what was that dim light heading west towards the convoy? Not one of us – we should all be heading east. I turned toward it and saw the bloody great shape of a big aeroplane dimly. It was obviously no friend of mine, so I opened fire.

"It was easy to get too close in the dark and knock down your target with a collision, so I broke away and started again. This time it was easy because the beast was on fire. One ring deflection, not a word of complaint the from the rear gunner. When I was nearly astern, a parachute opened, and the thing blew up – both were too close for comfort.

"All I had seen was the tail and that seemed like an He 177. Then I saw another one and went in, but he must have dropped his bombs because he climbed steeply and I stalled while trying to get a bead on him. Here, the cloud was more broken and his rear gunner very active, so I could see where he was, but I couldn't match his rate of climb. He disappeared into cloud and I lost contact."

The He 177 downed by Brander was that of Major Rieder and he and his six crew were killed. The convoy proceeded unharmed by either the Condors or the He 177s, nor did it fall victim to the two Operation Igel (Hedgehog) U-boat wolf packs ranging against OS 67/KMS 41 or the nine other convoys traversing the North Atlantic at the time. Of 30 U-boats involved, six were sunk and they claimed

**Pilots Norman Turner and Lawrie Brander the day after the action against the convoy attackers**
NIKKI WOOD

one victim – a merchantman from convoy UR-108. Three U-boats did attack OS 67/KMS 41's escorts, but were fended off.

## Tungsten and glass

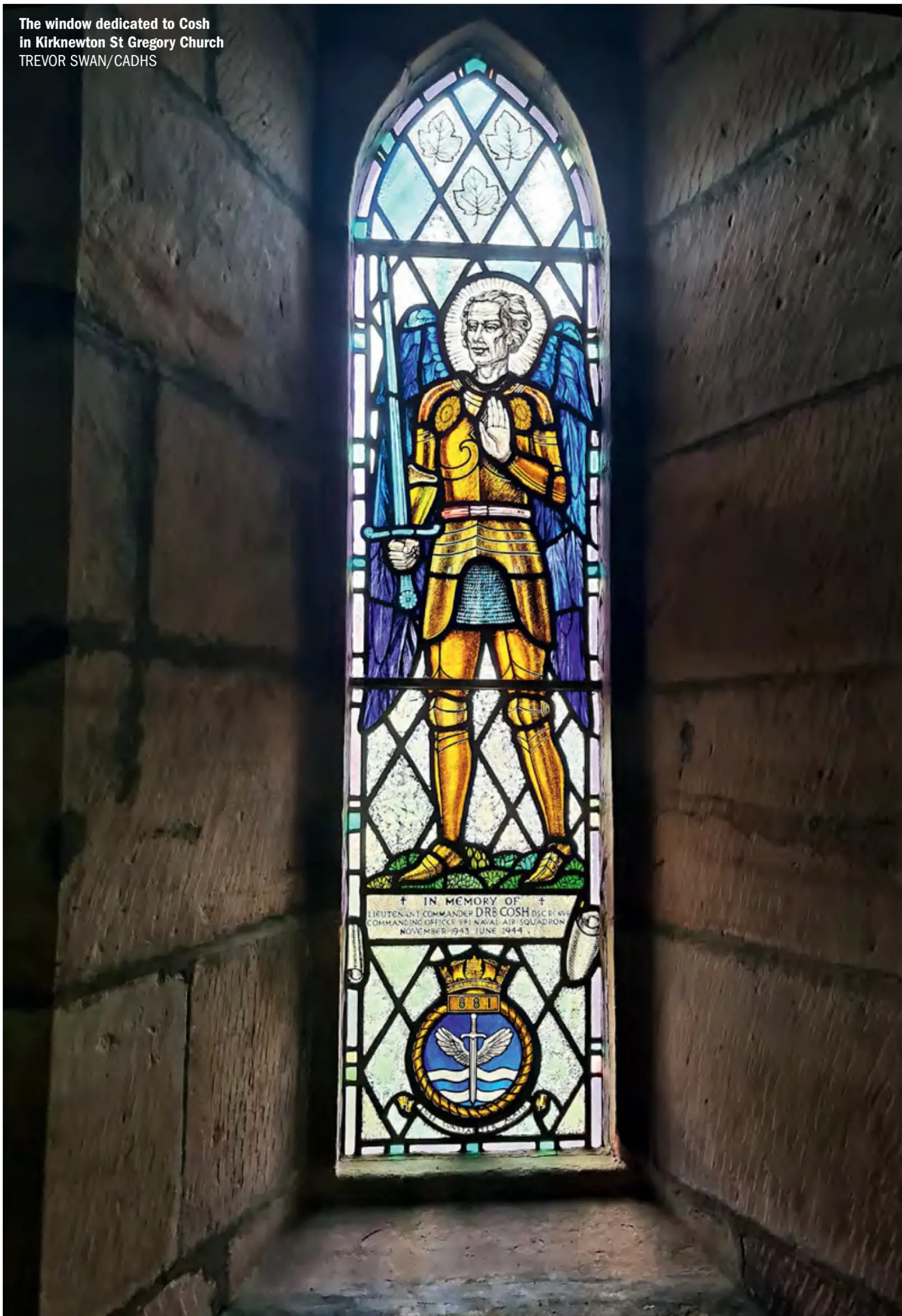
The losses did not end there for II./KG 40. At 0156hrs on February 13, 1944, Oberleutnant Heinz Ewers of 4./KG 40 lowered his undercarriage on final approach to Bordeaux-Mérignac, unaware that he was being followed by a 418 Squadron Mosquito flown by an American, Lieutenant James Luma, who described: "There was an explosion in the region of the cockpit, and as we shot underneath he appeared to be diving down after us. We broke off to starboard and the enemy went straight in three miles south of Bordeaux. He exploded with brilliant white sparks and was burning as we left."

The aircraft downed by Luma's two-second burst of fire was an He 177A-3, which crashed at Pessac, killing six of its crew. Incredibly, two gunners – Willi Klisch and Wolfgang Kanehl – survived.

In April 1944, 881 NAS took part in Operation Tungsten, the attack on Tirpitz for which Digby Cosh received the DSC. The award was announced on May 30, 1944, but 25 days later Cosh was dead. On June 24, while attached to the Fighter Leader School at RAF Millfield in Northumberland, he crashed while flying Spitfire Mk.Vb EN794.

His father was sent the following on October 26: "Your son was No.2 in a section of three Spitfires doing an exercise of practice dive-bombing on a small island used for air-to-ground practice between Goswick Station and Holy Island, eight miles south-southeast of Berwick-upon-Tweed. The leader, approaching the target, positioned himself and the section for the diving attack and went down. At 3,000ft there was broken cloud to the land side of the coast. The leader found that when he got down to the edge of the cloud he was badly placed for the attack and could not see the target [and] therefore pulled out of his dive and climbed again. The No.3 of the section, who closely followed Lieutenant-Commander Cosh, observed him at 3,000ft attempt to turn back under cloud to get to the target. Unfortunately, there was insufficient height to do such a manoeuvre at high speed, and he was unable to recover from the dive."

Digby Cosh crashed onto the Goswick Ranges, killing him instantly. On June 27, 1944, he was buried with full military honours at in Kirknewton St Gregory Churchyard in Wooler, Northumberland. A stained glass window inside the church, which remains there today, commemorates the man who led the Fleet Air Arm into its only action against the Luftwaffe's troubled heavy bomber. BW


IN MEMORY OF
LIEUTENANT COMMANDER DRB COSH DSC RNVR
COMMANDING OFFICER 881 NAVAL AIR SQUADRON
NOVEMBER 1943 JUNE 1944
881

**The window dedicated to Cosh in Kirknewton St Gregory Church**
TREVOR SWAN/CADHS

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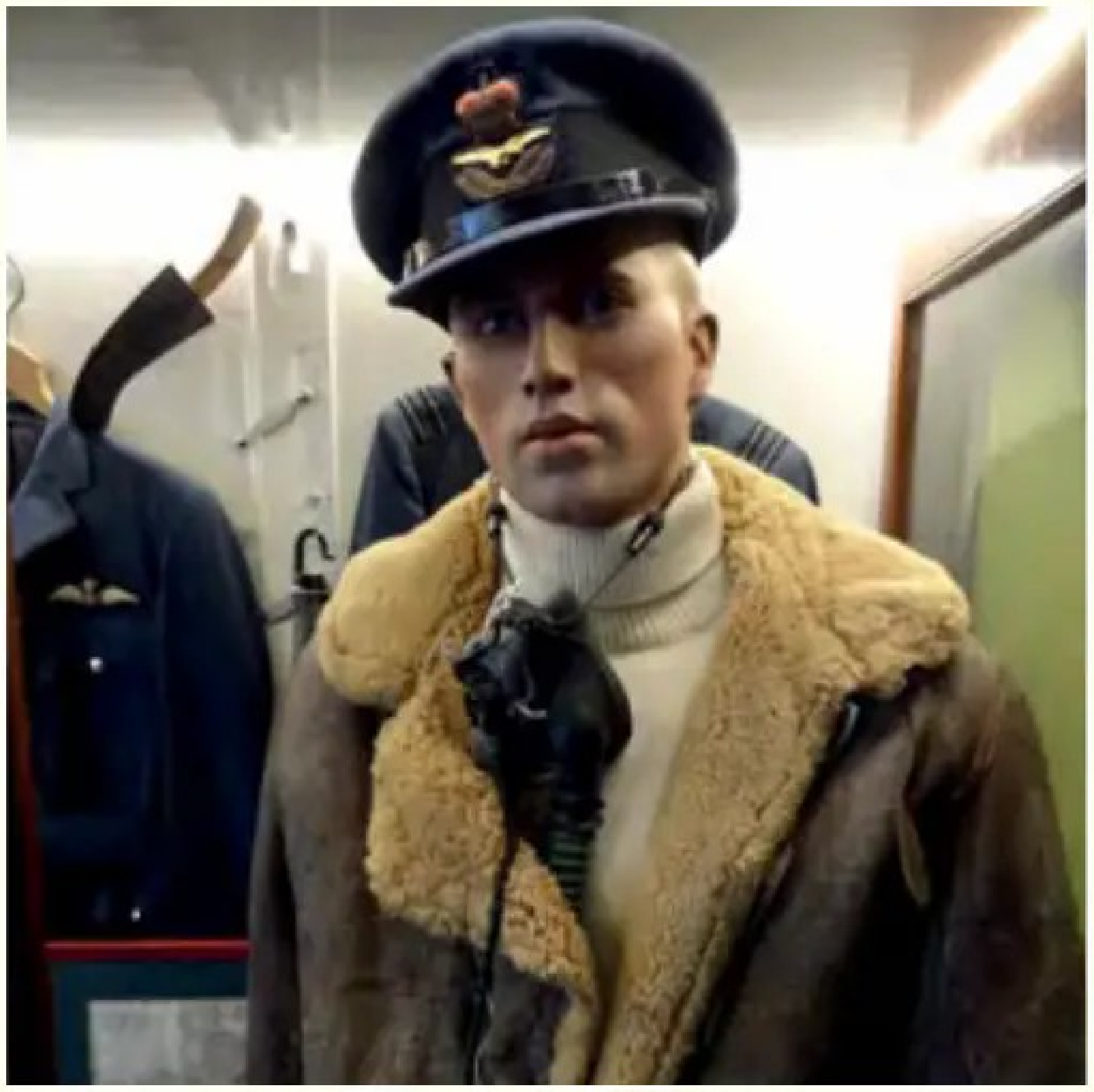

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# WINGS ACROSS THE SEAS

While no single factor can truly be deemed 'war-winning', one of the greatest enablers of Allied victory in World War Two was the Lend-Lease Act. **John Ash** unpicks the numbers revealing the scale of Lend-Lease's contribution to victory in the air

**US-made B-25 Mitchell Mk.IIs of 98 Squadron at RAF Dunsfold ahead of a morning raid to France. The British/Commonwealth received some 900 B-25s through Lend-Lease** STANLEY ARTHUR DEVON/RAF

## AN INITIAL $1,200,000,000 INVESTMENT

Prior to Lend-Lease and even the Destroyers-for-Bases agreement, the British were active in purchasing weapons and equipment from the United States. Famously, this included firearms such as the Thompson submachine gun, but of the $2 billion or so committed to purchasing US-produced war material before Lend-Lease, the majority – $1.2 billion of the spend – was allocated to aircraft.

Established in November 1939, with Anglo-Canadian industrialist Arthur Purvis as its director-general, the British Purchasing Commission oversaw the expansion of procurements from the US, while its parent organisation balanced British needs against those of the French to prevent delays and competing bids. Both British and French purchasing commissions functioned under the London-based Anglo-French Coordinating Committee, and a November 30, 1939, memo from the British Ambassador to the Department of State described its role: "The British and French Governments have decided upon the closest co-ordination of their economic war measures. For this purpose, they have set up a Coordinating Committee in London under the chairmanship of Jean Monnet and have appointed an Anglo-French Purchasing Board in the United States, of which Arthur Purvis will be chairman and M Bloch-Lainé vice-chairman. The board will co-ordinate the activities of the British and French Purchasing Commissions [and] has

**A Hudson light bomber on the US border with Canada** HUGH HALLIDAY

**Hudson Mk.II/IIIs of 233 Squadron. The Hudson was likely the first aircraft acquired by the British Purchasing Commission and was later supplied through Lend-Lease. The British purchase was Lockheed's biggest ever order at the time** B DAVENTRY/RAF

been instructed to establish and maintain the closest contact with the American Administration to keep [it] informed of its purchasing activities."

On November 4, 1939, President Franklin D Roosevelt signed the 1939 Neutrality Act into law, lifting the embargo on the sale of arms to Britain and France. According to *The New York Times* newspaper, by November 7, – just three days later – "British and French war purchases in this country since the embargo was lifted might total $1,000,000,000 [£225,000,000]."

After the French surrender in June 1940, Purvis enabled the commission to take on all existing French contracts for arms, totalling some $612 million.

War equipment was initially purchased on a 'cash and carry' basis in which the British paid outright using gold or dollar reserves and were responsible for delivery and transport. Aircraft – both complete airframes and components – comprised the greatest portion of the spend, with 28 types sourced and Britain also taking on extant Dutch and Belgian contracts.

However, their delivery presented something of a problem. Until June 1940, it remained illegal to transport US arms directly into belligerent countries, leading to the curious situation where aircraft were flown to airfields near the border with Canada and taxied to the international boundary. There, Canadian crews would haul them across with ropes. Once in Canada, aircraft were flown to Britain or crated and sent by sea.

## 31,000 AIRCRAFT GOING ONE WAY...

**President Franklin D Roosevelt signing the Lead-Lease Act into law on March 11, 1941**
US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

On March 11, 1941, the Lend-Lease Act was signed into law, freeing up Britain's capability to purchase ever-larger quantities of war materiel and simplifying its transfer/delivery. Lend-Lease was military aid a on a phenomenal scale. According to a January 1945 report, US Congress appropriated $13 billion to Lend-Lease by November 1941. By 1943, a staggering $1 billion of goods was being provided monthly, increasing by $500 million per month before June 1944.

All forms of arms and military vehicles were sent via Lend-Lease to more than 30 Allied nations, but this only accounted for about half of transfers, the remainder largely comprising foodstuffs, fuel and industrial commodities. The programme's value was $35 billion by December 1944 and represented some 15% of US war production. Even so, Lend-Lease equipment accounted for just 10% of Britain's war materiel, such was the scale of the conflict.

Aircraft were a huge part of the scheme, with the same source stating at least 31,000 airframes were supplied via Lend-Lease – of every 100 produced in the US, 18% went to Allied combatants.

Statistical research from 2022 suggests the value of US-made aircraft and aeronautical components sent to the British alone totalled $5 billion. Further, the Soviets received almost 18,000 aircraft via Lend-Lease, including at least 4,600 from the British.

**P-51 Mustang Mk.IIIs of 19 Squadron. The RAF received some 1,500 Mustangs, a type built to meet a requirement provided by the British Purchasing Commission. The Mustang is both an example of Lend-Lease and Reverse Lend-Lease, as it was a US-built aircraft that, from the P-51B onwards, famously used licence-built Merlin engines**
STANLEY ARTHUR DEVON/RAF

## ...AND 1,000 GOING THE OTHER

While the bulk of transferred war materiel came from the US, Lend-Lease was not one-way and the US received British aircraft through a process known as Reverse Lend-Lease.

While the Americans fulfilled the majority of their own aviation needs and accepted just a few British-built types into service, some 1,000 aircraft such as the Spitfire, Mosquito and Beaufighter (and 300 Horsa gliders) were to still to play a significant role in US campaigns.

Four USAAF units – the 414th, 415th, 416th and 417th Night Fighter Squadrons (NFS) – adopted Beaufighters. Early in the war, the only US night-fighter available was the P-70, a modified A-20 Havoc fitted with British radars. This was ill-suited for European operations so these units received Beaufighters, which continued to fly in US units into 1945. The type was flown by American pilots on day/night convoy-escort patrols, interception, anti-intruder and target-illumination sorties plus ground-attack missions, as well as covering the invasions of Sicily, Anzio and southern France.

Most Beaufighters were replaced as night-fighters by the P-61 Black Widow, but another British type was also adopted: the Mosquito NF Mk.XXX, used by the 416th and 425th NFS. Mosquitos were used by at least eight USAAF squadrons, and in addition to the two NFS, it was operated by the 653rd and 654th Bomb Squadrons of the 25th Bombardment Group (BG), units of 492nd BG, and the 8th Reconnaissance (Special) and 8th Weather Reconnaissance squadrons of the 802nd Reconnaissance Group. The selected variant was typically the PR Mk.XVI, and US-marked Mossies flew observation and weather recce flights ahead of USAAF bombers, long-range aerial reconnaissance, and Chaff/Window radar interference sorties from 1944 until the end of the war. Other roles included supporting clandestine OSS efforts in occupied-Europe.

Reverse Lend-Lease was not limited to whole airframes, with British infrastructure and components including spark plugs or sensitive equipment such as radars supplied. The total value of Reverse Lend-Lease approached $8 billion, and it was significant in enabling the USAAF to operate in Europe. Briefing Congress in April 1944, US Foreign Economic Administrator Leo Crowley stated: “Just as the RAF’s operations against Germany and the invasion coasts would not have been possible on their present scale without Lend-Lease, so the United States 8th and 9th Air Forces daylight missions from Britain would not have been possible without Reverse Lend-Lease.

“Our Fortresses and Liberators take off from huge air bases built, equipped and serviced under Reverse Lend-Lease at a cost to them of hundreds of millions of dollars. Many of our pilots fly Spitfires built in England, many more are flying American fighter planes powered by British Rolls-Royce Merlin engines. And many of the supplies needed by our air force are procured for us without cost by Reverse Lend-Lease. In fact, our armed forces in Britain – ground as well as air – receive as Reverse Lend-Lease, with no payment by us, one third of all the supplies and equipment they currently require. Britain furnishes 90% of their medical supplies and, in spite of her food shortage, 20% of their food.”

**A USAAF Mosquito B Mk.XX operated as a test aircraft by the NACA (the forerunner to NASA). USAAF Mossies were used for night-fighting or reconnaissance** NASA

## 600 BRITISH FIGHTERS FLYING WITH US STARS

Among the British aircraft supplied was the Spitfire. The Americans were familiar with its capabilities, having had the opportunity to evaluate it, as well as benefitting from the experience of US volunteers serving in the RAF at the beginning of the war. The USAAF used Spitfire Mk.Vs until August 1943, when it began to receive Mk.VIII and Mk.IX airframes, flying some 600 ‘Spits’ overall.

Three squadrons within the 4th Fighter Group (FG), formed in September 1942 and incorporating many American ‘Eagle volunteers’ who had flown in the RAF prior to the United States’ entry to the war, used the Spitfire as did the 4th FG, which flew them until early 1943 when it received P-47 Thunderbolts. The 31st FG flew them over Dieppe and later in North Africa and Italy until it replaced its Mk.IXs with P-51B Mustangs from March 1944. The 52nd FG also operated in North Africa and Italy, replacing its Mk.IXs with P-51Bs from April 1944. Spitfires flown by the pilots of these three groups are credited with some 350 victories, and 23 airmen became aces flying US-marked Spitfires.

The Spitfire furnished the Americans with another valuable capability: photo-reconnaissance. There were, of course, ample US-made aircraft able to fulfil this role, but Spitfire PR.XIs were also flown by American aviators. The 68th Photographic Reconnaissance Group (PRG) flew Spits until mid-1944 and the 7th PRG operated them until the end of the war.

In addition, the US Navy’s VCS-7 swapped its floatplanes for Spitfire Mk.Vbs to co-ordinate naval gunfire support through the Battle of Normandy, flying 200 sorties. The Spitfire was more survivable than the unit’s slower, vulnerable OS2U Kingfishers.

Although not officially adopted by the USAAF, the Americans did fly three examples of Britain’s other iconic fighter. Hurricane Mk.I P3757 was struck off charge during the Battle of Britain but somehow found itself repaired and flying in US service, Hurricane Mk.IIb BP654 flew with the 350th FG in Italy, as did Mk.IIc LB640. Each was likely used as a target-tug and liaison/squadron ‘hack’.

**US-marked Spitfire Mk.Vbs of the 107th FS at RAF Membury** GEORGE PECK COLLECTION/SDASM

## 54 AMERICAN TYPES WITH BRITS AT THE STICK

Although powered flight was barely 40 years old, military aviation had evolved rapidly and, by World War Two, aircraft had been tailored to perform many roles. These ranged from the obvious combat and reconnaissance missions down to trainers, artillery spotting/fire control, rescue, liaison and highly specialised airborne radar, electronic warfare or minesweeping roles among numerous other roles.

At least 54 major US-built aircraft types were adopted by the British, fufilling a huge range of missions. In no particular order, this included bombers of all types: Ventura, Baltimore, Maryland, Hudson, Vengeance, A-20 Havoc, A-26 Invader, B-25 Mitchell, B-26 Marauder, B-17 Flying Fortress, B-24 Liberator; flying boats and floatplanes: PBY Catalina, JRF Goose, J4F Widgeon, PBM Mariner, SO3C Seamew, OS2U Kingfisher; carrier-borne fighters: F4F Wildcat, F4U Corsair, F6F Hellcat; carrier strike aircraft: A-17, SB2A Buccaneer, SB2C Helldiver, SB2U Vindicator, TBF Avenger; land-based fighters: P-36, P-39 and P-40 'Hawks', F2A Buffalo, P-47 Thunderbolt, P-51 Mustang; a small number of early helicopters: PA-39, R-4, and R-6; and several aircraft types fulfilling numerous training, transport, liaison and other supporting roles; Staggerwing, Fairchild 24, C-80, Electra, Electra Junior, Super Electra, Lodestar, J-4, UC-71, L-1, L-5, Reliant, UC-72, Waco/Hadrian gliders, T-6 Harvard, 18/C Expeditor, Boeing 247, DC-2, C-47, C-54 and C-87.

**Five A-36 Apaches (attack variant of the P-51) bound for Britain. The RAF received seven for evaluation, making the Apache one of the lesser-known Lend-Lease aircraft** NARA

## AMERICA'S NO.1 WAR-WINNING AIRCRAFT

Lend-Lease aircraft undoubtedly influenced the outcome of World War Two. VLR Liberators in British/Canadian service helped closed the Atlantic 'Black Gap', finally ensuring the vital transatlantic lifeline would be protected from U-boats at all times (weather permitting). Mustangs – escort fighters with the range of many bombers – in British hands occasionally joined those protecting USAAF bombers in daylight sorties to Berlin and back, also supporting RAF bombing efforts. A capable fighter and ground-attack aircraft, the Mustang also furnished the RAF with an additional fighter-bomber.

Catalinas bolstered Coastal Command with a long-range, high-endurance patroller, U-boat hunter and air-sea rescuer that could fly further than the Sunderland. Hellcats, Corsairs and Avengers furnished the Fleet Air Arm with wholly modern carrier-borne air wings that gradually supplanted most British naval types and complemented the Seafire, Firefly and Barracuda.

However, arguably, the single most important Lend-Lease aircraft was a modified airliner. The C-47 Skytrain – or Dakota in British service – was a versatile and rugged transport praised by US General Dwight D Eisenhower as one of his four essential 'war-winning' weapons. The RAF received more than 1,900 Dakotas and the type equipped 46 British squadrons. The British did develop and operate their own transport aircraft during the war, but the wide availability of the Dakota meant these otherwise necessary programmes could be reduced in priority and British production and resources could be focused on developing and building the bombers and fighters needed at the time. Lend-Lease, therefore, through the Dakota, furnished the RAF with the lion's share of its transport, paratrooper delivery, glider towing and aero-medical evacuation needs for much of the war in the west.

While important to the progress of the war in Europe, the C-47 was essential in the Far East. Some historians suggest that a British victory in the China-India-Burma theatre would not have been possible without the range, endurance and capacity of the Dakota, which kept the Fourteenth Army supplied at the furthest extents of its advance in an operational landscape unforgiving to cargo-laden wheeled transport. In addition, the Dakota flew over 'the Hump', passing the Himalayas to keep the Chinese supplied.

**Arguably the most important Lend-Lease aircraft was the Dakota. These 512 and 575 Squadron Dakota Mk.IIIs are pictured in Normandy, loading medical evacuees** DE LUAN/ALAMY

**Chris Price (right) and Chris Copson with the museum's Cromwell Mk.IV**
THE TANK MUSEUM

# Telling the Stories of Tanks and Tank Men

THE RHINE
CANADIAN ARMIES

**Phil Loder** ventured to Dorset to talk to **Chris Price** and **Chris Copson** from The Tank Museum, asking how it's going and what's next at the home of British historic armour

68
INDEPENDENT
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**The museum's successful public event days have helped to boost the museum's platform. Here, The Churchill Trust's Churchill Mk.III lines up to 'fire' at the museum's Tiger 131 – currently unique as the world's only running Tiger I – during a re-enactment of the capture of this very Tiger tank in Tunisia in 1943** PHIL LODER

The Tank Museum in Bovington, Dorset, has seen a remarkable transformation over the past 20 years. The changes have been both in the collection and how it is presented, but also in the global reach of what is, essentially, a specialist regimental museum in a rural part of southern England.

The team has made the most of a surging interest in tanks and armoured vehicles, which has been propelled in part by a new generation of tank-based computer games, such as *World of Tanks*. In particular, the museum's digital output has expanded and evolved, sharing the extensive collection via informative and engaging posts and YouTube videos. But also Tankfest, the museum's annual display of historic moving armour, has grown in size and scope, plus spring and autumn Tiger Days see large crowds visit to see Tiger 131 and other vehicles in the arena.

Chris Price took over as the director of museum in early 2024, and Chris Copson has become a key presenter of its videos as David Fletcher and then David Willey retired from the museum team. I caught up with Chris P and Chris C to hear about what's been going on at the museum, and to ask about the latest plans to tell the stories of tanks and the crews who served in them.

**Phil:** *You've been director of The Tank Museum for over a year-and-a-half now, so how's it going?*

**Chris P:** I think it's going all right – I'm still here, which is a good indication that it's going reasonably well. We have a demanding – quite rightly demanding – board of directors who require that we deliver The Tank Museum in the way to which they have become accustomed, and also to be mindful of our charitable objectives. I'm very lucky in the staff I've inherited, and they are very motivated, focused on what we want to achieve.

**Phil:** *Beyond steam trains vs tanks, what have been your observations comparing the North Yorkshire Moors Railway and The Tank Museum?*

**Chris P:** There's a great belief that anybody who's chief executive of an organisation is the conductor of the orchestra and they sit there dictating every note that is played. But in reality, that is not the case in any way, shape or form.

My position at The Tank Museum is very similar to my role at the North Yorkshire Moors Railway, with the same number of staff, but operationally it's probably easier at The Tank Museum. Running a railway timetable is a challenge, and nobody

## CHRIS PRICE, DIRECTOR

Despite now being director of The Tank Museum, Chris Price's first job after school was in the RAF. He served as an engineering technician, including during the First Gulf War, but in 1994 decided to head in a different direction, moving into the heritage railway sector. Positions at the Talyllyn and Fairbourne Railways in North Wales, plus management training, led to Chris being offered the role of chief executive at the Talyllyn Railway.

After two years, Chris moved across the country to the North Yorkshire Moors Railway (NYMR), which he led for the next eight years. The NYMR is an accredited museum and while there Chris gained a range of experience about how museums operate. He became very involved with the Association of Independent Museums, completing one of their leadership training courses, and also found that the museum side of the railway was equally as interesting as running the trains.

When the role of director of The Tank Museum was advertised, Chris felt he could bring together and use his previous experience. While he wouldn't call himself a 'tank nerd', he admits to having become addicted to the stories of tanks and the crews who served in them.

> *"I'm very lucky in the staff I've inherited, and they are very motivated"*
>
> Chris Price, director

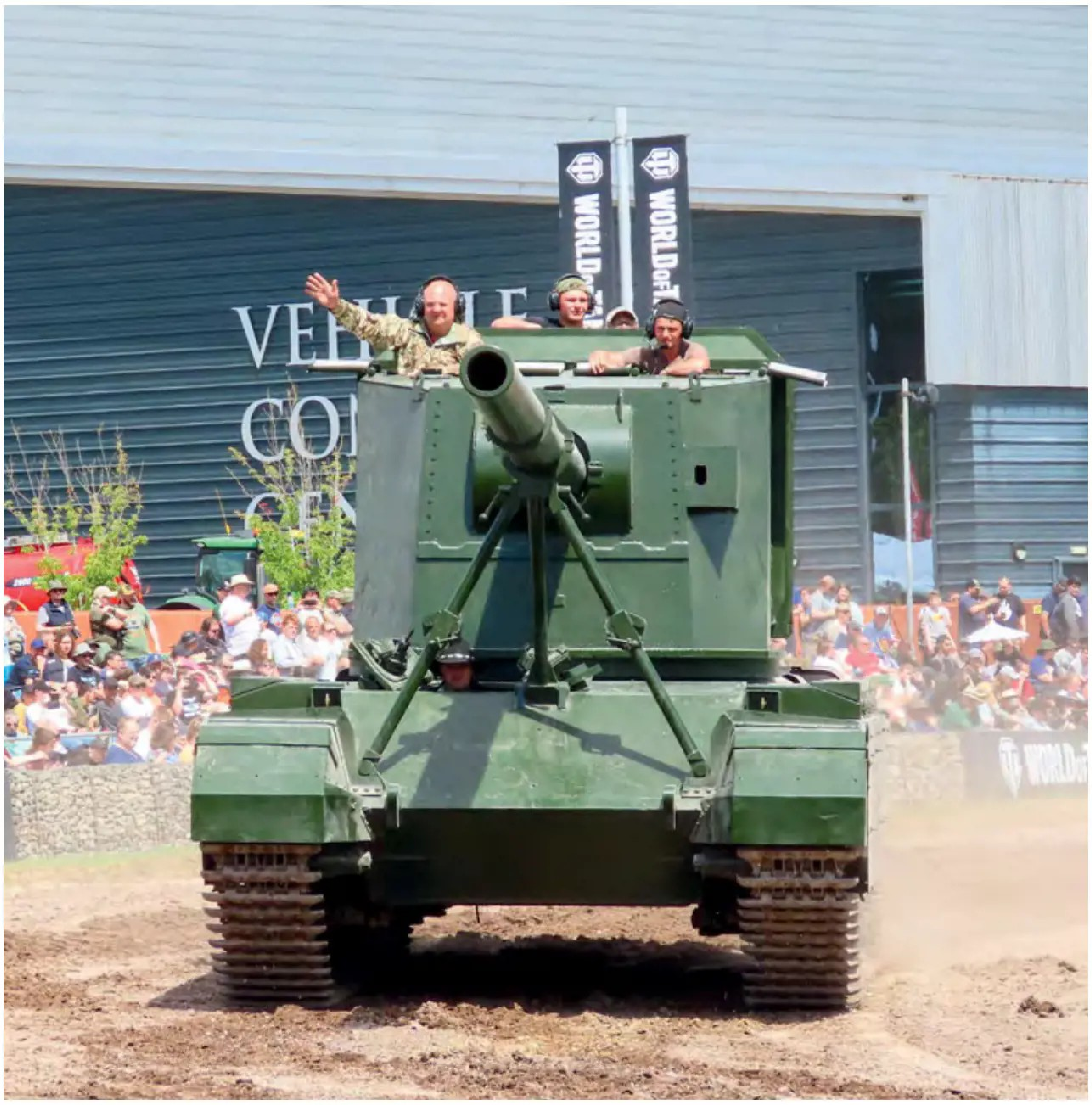
A huge range of tanks and armoured vehicles, big and small, can be found within the museum PETER TRIMMING

> *"We don't regularly set fire to the countryside like a steam railway, which is good – well, we do, but on purpose and we put it out!"*
>
> CHRIS PRICE, DIRECTOR

should ever do it! Also at The Tank Museum, we don't regularly set fire to the countryside like a steam railway, which is good – well, we do, but on purpose and we put it out!

Operationally, The Tank Museum is far more embedded into process than it was. It was operational first, museum second, whereas I'm hoping that we're becoming a museum-led organisation. Both the NYMR and The Tank Museum involve big and heavy engineering that's very expensive, and we spend a large amount of our time working out where all the money is going to be spent. From that point of view, I would say it's very similar, but the subject matter is obviously different.

**Phil:** *Are you bringing in new approaches, and what are you planning for the next couple of years?*
**Chris P:** Funnily enough, I'm currently reviewing the five-year strategic plan that was written last year. Now we are one year


Chris Price waves from the top of the newly restored FV4005, a former museum gate guard and now part of its running fleet, during Tankfest 2024 PHIL LODER

New posts in the curatorial team will focus on looking after the museum's core collection of tanks, such as this A13 Cruiser Mk.II – the type served in France and North Africa early in the war PHIL LODER

into it, I'm checking on progress, but we've slightly changed the focus.

Since COVID, everybody is very aware of the commercial success of The Tank Museum – the growth online – but I'd noticed that we had a little bit forgotten why we were doing it. We'd become so wrapped up in the commercial success that it was driving a lot of the change agenda within the organisation.

I would like to see it in balance, so that the commercial aspects are in balance and in tune with what we're doing as a museum, and the way we've done that is to focus around our charitable objectives. The Tank Museum is above anything else a charity. It is there as an educational charity, and it can only deliver that with the commercial and museum teams working hand in hand.

Consequently, what we have done over the past 12 months is to invest into our curatorial team. We brought in a new head of curatorial services – Nick Booth, we have brought in other new posts, and we're about to start recruiting with a focus on looking after our core collection of tanks as well as the running collection. And we're also enhancing the care of our archives, investing in the fabric of the archive building, and we sought and achieved archive accreditation over the last 12 months.

So, it's making sure that we're a more-balanced organisation. I think, from an enthusiast point of view and from a public point of view, it's the right way to go. Ultimately, we're here for the tanks and the stories and the people who served in them.

**Phil:** *How did the museum approach the retirement of David Willey?*

**Chris P:** When a retirement is handled well, it is a change in relationship – it isn't the end of a relationship. The immediate reaction to the announcement of David's retirement was often, "where's the tank expertise going to come from?" but, in reality, David managed a team of researchers and historians, so we still have that tank expertise because he wasn't a man on his own. Any organisation that wants to keep going has got to think about succession planning and, thankfully, The Tank Museum has.

I wouldn't say it's been seamless, because you can never replace a personality like David without there being some disruption, but ultimately, I don't think it's impacted negatively too much on the day-to-day running of the museum. And David is still coming in and working with us on events such as Tankfest and Tiger Day. He's also writing a book for us at the moment, so he's still very much part of the picture.

Another of the museum's unique exhibits is M4A1 Sherman 'Michael', the oldest surviving Sherman, the second production Sherman completed and the first delivered to Britain via lend-lease. It was named after Michael Dewar, a British industrialist key to securing the US Lend-Lease Act PHIL LODER

**Chris Copson and the media team film a segment about the museum's Panzer II Ausf L Luchs** THE TANK MUSEUM

THE PRINCESS ROYAL
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**The museum's running Matilda II was completed in 1941, and its meticulous restoration was the subject of the *Matilda Diaries* video series on YouTube that began in 2016** PHIL LODER

## CHRIS COPSON, HISTORIAN AND PRESENTER

Chris Copson will be familiar to many enthusiasts from The Tank Museum's YouTube videos and his expert commentary during events in the museum's arena. He has a background in archaeology and began his career as a field archaeologist, as well as serving in the Territorial Army in the final years of the Cold War.

Chris studied for a Postgraduate Certificate in Education and taught for several years, and also served as The Tank Museum's education officer for ten years. He then took up the role of curator of The Keep Museum in Dorchester – the regimental museum of the Devonshire and Dorset Regiment and its previous formations. A period as collections director at the Haynes Motor Museum near Yeovil brought Chris into contact with vehicles again and, a few years ago, he was tempted back to The Tank Museum to join the team delivering the museum's popular online content.

Recently, Chris's job title became 'Historian and Presenter', which reflects both his work in front of the camera and in the museum arena, and the historical research he does during video development. Chris is also beginning to be involved in the museum's growing book publishing programme.

**Phil:** *Do you have an update on the 2045 Plan to have running vehicles for the centenary of the end of World War Two?*
**Chris P:** I think planning for 2045 is more of a subliminal aim rather than a solid plan saying, "this is what we're going to do to get there". But while we're not changing the focus of our collection and still want to keep it relevant and look at contemporary developments, ultimately, yes, we want to make completely sure that we have World War Two vehicles available in our running fleet in 2045.

We've had some help from the Bannister Historic Armour Collection, in that they've restored some World War Two tanks, so we're working in combination with them. William Bannister is a trustee of the museum and he buys and restores specific vehicles used by the British Army in World War Two. His collection includes M3A1 and M5A1 Stuarts, an M4A4 Sherman, an A27L Centaur III, an M24 Chaffee and an M3 Grant, and they take part in Tankfest and Tiger Days, often with William in the turret! There are some gaps we need to fill between now and 2045, but my observation is that we can currently field a good, representative set of tanks.

**Phil:** *What's been the approach in the evolution of the museum's YouTube output over the last couple of years?*
**Chris C:** Traditionally, what we were doing were the *Tank Chats* – David Fletcher or David Willey standing next to a tank and talking about it, with some additional footage edited in. We typically called those Man and Tank videos, and a lot of those were very short, around five to seven minutes.

Now we've moved to more long-form videos of 20-25 minutes, and we're doing a bit more of a deep dive. We started off with *Tank Chats Reloaded*, which looked at the vehicles inside and outside, and asked: What's it like to crew this vehicle? What makes it work? How good is it actually?

We've also begun a series of evolution videos looking at aspects of armoured warfare such as guns, ammunition and armour protection. They're going really well, and some are scoring more than a million views. It's been important to adapt how we present for a YouTube audience

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TANKS

Pre-war vehicles such as the museum's Vickers Light Tank Mk.IV (shown) and its Rolls-Royce Armoured Car are among the oldest running vehicles in the museum fleet, and the attraction seeks to guarantee that it has genuine World War Two vehicles still running in 2045 – when the 'newest' would be a century old! PHIL LODER

> *"We want to make sure that we have World War Two vehicles available in our running fleet in 2045"*
>
> CHRIS PRICE, DIRECTOR

– how we put information over and try to communicate complex technical stuff in a way that not only appeals to the tank nuts, but also to the general audience.

**Chris P:** Also, it aligns with our charitable objectives – it's education and it's fundamentally what we should be doing. We have a responsibility to make sure that our videos are educational and they are now broader view looking at the story, rather than just being lots and lots of stats about a tank plus an opinion.

**Chris C:** What is key is 'interpretation'. It's about telling the story and that's what museums are all about. There's no point in having a museum full of stuff if nobody knows what it is. So, interpretation, in whatever form, is the big thing, and YouTube is a way of reaching an audience which is global. There are viewers on the other side of the world who will probably never come to the museum itself, but they know about the kit that's here because of this extraordinary online presence.

The *New York Times* decided that we were the most-viewed, most-successful museum YouTube channel in the world. When you're beating the likes of the British Museum, New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Louvre in Paris, then that's doing pretty well. In 2023, we reached 100 million views on our videos and 500,000 subscribers, and now we have over 1.2 million subscribers – which is a very large and very engaged audience.

**Phil:** *What's the plan to keep the content coming and is there anything you can share that tank fans can look forward to?*

**Chris C:** I think what we're doing is to look at things in a different way – as I said, we've covered just about every vehicle in the collection in the form of the *Tank Chats*, but there are an awful lot that need revisiting and dealing with in greater detail and also in combination. For example, if you put a Sherman and a T-34 together, what's good, what's bad and which one comes out on top?

Also, we want to cover specific engagements on the battlefield. I'm just researching one of the last tank actions of World War Two – certainly for the British Army. Comets of 3rd Royal Tank Regiment (RTR) came up against a solitary Tiger. It took place in a location I know quite well, the area of Hohne-Fallingbostel, which was a British Army tank training area during the Cold War.

In this particular incident, World War Two is coming to an end, but you have a Tiger crewed by staff from the local tank training school and they're determined to have a go at the Allies. You get these fascinating little snippets, and there's certainly no shortage of material.

**Phil:** *Are you and Paul Famojuro (AKA Fam the Tank Man) still the main presenters for Tank Museum videos?*

**Chris C:** Paul has mainly done TikTok in the past, but he's doing more long-form videos on YouTube now, and we've also been doing some two-handers where we present parts of the same video. We also spend quite a lot of time in the arena over

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The museum works with its trustees and allies in the sector such as William Bannister, here filling the commander's role in his restored Centaur III at Tankfest 2024 PHIL LODER

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**Chris Copson is currently researching an engagement between Comets of 3 RTR and a Tiger I in April 1945 for a forthcoming video** PHIL LODER

the summer, because I do the commentary for the Tanks in Action displays, and Fam often leads the infantry – visitors who we recruit on the day to take part in the show. It's great fun and we get lots of audience interaction.

We're also going to be introducing new members of the team for the videos, so we develop a 'stable' of presenters. For example, James Donaldson, one of my colleagues, is about to present a long-form video on the T-55. The idea is that you won't see the same face on the screen the whole time. Fam will carry on with TikTok, but we've got a lot of talent here, so the idea is that everyone has the opportunity to present either singly or in combination.

**Phil:** *Do you and Fam have particular areas of historical interest, or particular nations you're fascinated by?*
**Chris C:** Fam has an interest in Soviet armour, particularly the legendary T-34. He has been putting together a very good video on why the T-34 wasn't better than it was – why the tank turned out to be a bit of a bag of bolts.

From my perspective, the thing that floats my boat is World War One – not just the tank aspect, but I tend to think of World War One as my period. I was the curator of the Devon and Dorsets Regimental Museum in Dorchester and those two regiments were heavily involved in the conflict in various theatres. And, of course, World War One saw the birth of armoured warfare, whether it's the British, the French with the Renault FT and other models, and even the Germans with the A7V Sturmpanzerwagen.

**Phil:** *Have there been any standout items about British tanks and tank crewmen donated recently?*
**Chris C:** People are very generous – we constantly get donations, whether it's photo albums or medal groups, and

**The museum's Centurion Mk.I was one of six sent to Germany in May 1945 for Operation Sentry, a trials programme. Today it is preserved as an important part of Britain's tank history** PHIL LODER

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**Challenger 1 'Flying Fox' is one of the more recent additions to the museum's running fleet of historic armour** PHIL LODER

POST WAR
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The Tank Museum has come a long way from its interwar opening as a regimental collection, and has wowed people of all ages – including this family in 1960 – since its public opening in 1947 TOPFOTO

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After driving The Tank Museum's recently restored M47 Patton, Chris Price would join Arnold Schwarzenegger in owning an example of the US 1950s classic, while Chris Copson would dearly love to own a Carden-Loyd Carrier PHIL LODER

> *"When you're beating the likes of the British Museum, New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Louvre in Paris, then that's doing pretty well"*
>
> Chris Copson, historian and presenter

obviously most of the guys who were awarded the medals or put together the albums are long gone, so it's effectively their families. We do get some extraordinary things offered to us.

There's one we haven't received yet that is not directly tank-related, but it's absolutely fascinating. It is a miniature watchmaker's lathe, and it was built out of scrap by an RTR Trooper called Bill Linfield in a POW camp in Austria. He was a watchmaker in civilian life, joined the RTR, was captured in Greece in 1941, and then he built this working lathe out of a broken stainless steel shaving mirror, bicycle spokes and things like that. It's a piece of POW production from an RTR soldier, built in order to repair other people's watches in the camp. That's absolutely amazing.

**Chris P:** At my first collections meeting – where the collections team examine all the donations – we had been given a pair of silk knickers that were made by a bride before her wedding, using silk that her husband had recovered from a German parachute. It was an RTR soldier and an RTR bride and, as such, it was relevant. I think it's one of the most fascinating meetings I get the opportunity to sit in.

**Chris C:** Some of the little personal items tell stories without words. We might receive a medal group and that's fair enough – they've been awarded, and the guy has worn them with pride after the war. But in the same box, there's an RTR cap badge. You look at it and it's just about flat, because it was a point of pride to polish your cap badge until all the detail disappeared. Something like that cap badge, something that's tangible, gives you an insight into the individual concerned.

**Phil:** *And finally, do you own any historic military vehicles yourselves? And with no limits, which military vehicle would you have?*

**Chris C:** I did have an ex-RAF Series II Land Rover, but had to sell it as we had children. You cannot fit car seats in a Series II Land Rover and it's not a child-friendly environment inside!

With no holds barred, I would like a Carden-Loyd Carrier, the predecessor of the Universal Carrier. I'm interested in the 1920s-30s when the British were at the forefront of armoured warfare development and the Carden-Loyd sums all that up. There were huge exercises on Salisbury Plain in which everything was wheeled or tracked. Given a choice, and with somebody to look after it and take it places for me when I wanted to have a run out, I would have a Carden-Loyd Carrier.

**Chris P:** My first choice – thinking with my head – would be a Wolf Land Rover. I'd be quite happy to look after that myself. But, in my opinion, anything bigger combines all the bad aspects of a classic car and magnifies them – they're unreliable and expensive. Maintenance of a tracked vehicle certainly puts into perspective popping round to Kwik Fit with your car.

That said, I must admit that I had the chance to drive the museum's recently restored M47 Patton, so if I had to have a tracked vehicle, I think I'd join Arnold Schwarzenegger with his M47. It is a much easier vehicle to drive than I ever expected it to be!

Christmas
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# YORK ARMY MUSEUM

**Tom Baker** travels to the historic city of York to explore a collection dedicated to the service and sacrifice of the Yorkshire soldier from 1685 to the present day

On June 27, 1743, King George II rode among the battle lines of his men. He would be the last British monarch to lead troops into combat. His army – 50,000 British, Hanoverian and Austrian troops of the 'Pragmatic Army' – was destined for Hanau. In their path was Dettingen, and the Duc de Noailles' 70,000-strong force of Frenchmen. King George had no choice but to force an advance, but Noailles' tantalising vision of capturing the king was not to be. His subordinates disobeyed orders to stay put and advanced in disorder. French heavy cavalry, including the elite Maison du Roi, began driving back the British cavalry into their own infantry lines.

Amid the crush of sabres and echoes of shot, Cornet Henry Richardson of Ligonier's Horse – later the 7th Dragoon Guards – clasped one hand around the staff of the 'First', the Regimental Standard. In cutting a path to safety, Richardson suffered 37 separate wounds, yet the colours he saved still snapped above him: a blood-red square of crimson silk.

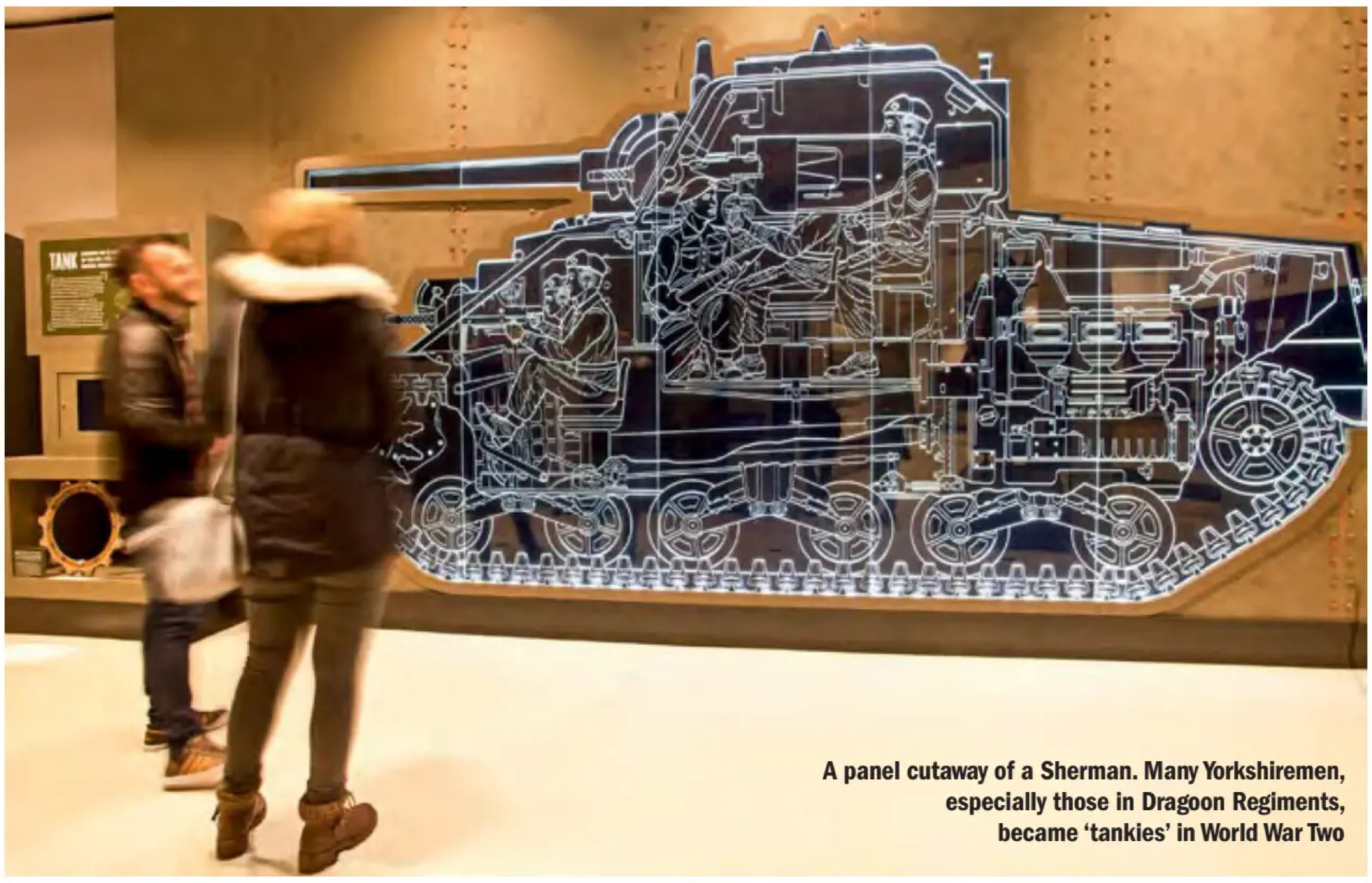
Gifted to Richardson for his valour following the Battle of Dettingen, and passed down the generations of his family, the 'Dettingen Standard' is now displayed within the walls of the York Army Museum, nestled in the centre of the North Yorkshire city. As the oldest British cavalry colours in existence, the Standard is displayed among hundreds of similar artefacts dedicated to charting the 300-year history of the Yorkshire soldier from 1685 to the present.

The York Army Museum's story began in 1984, when two regimental collections – those of the Prince of Wales's Own Regiment of Yorkshire and the Royal Dragoon Guards – merged inside York's former Territorial Drill Hall, opposite Clifford's Tower. In 2013, a £1 million National Lottery Heritage Fund grant enabled a full refurbishment and the birth of a new institution: the York Army Museum. Reopened in 2015, the museum celebrated its tenth anniversary this year and now welcomes more than 20,000 visitors each year.

Though deceptively modest from the street, the museum reveals itself as 'Tardis'-like within. As visitors enter through reception, they descend stairs into one great hall divided into six interpretive zones, each tackling a different aspect of Yorkshire's military story.

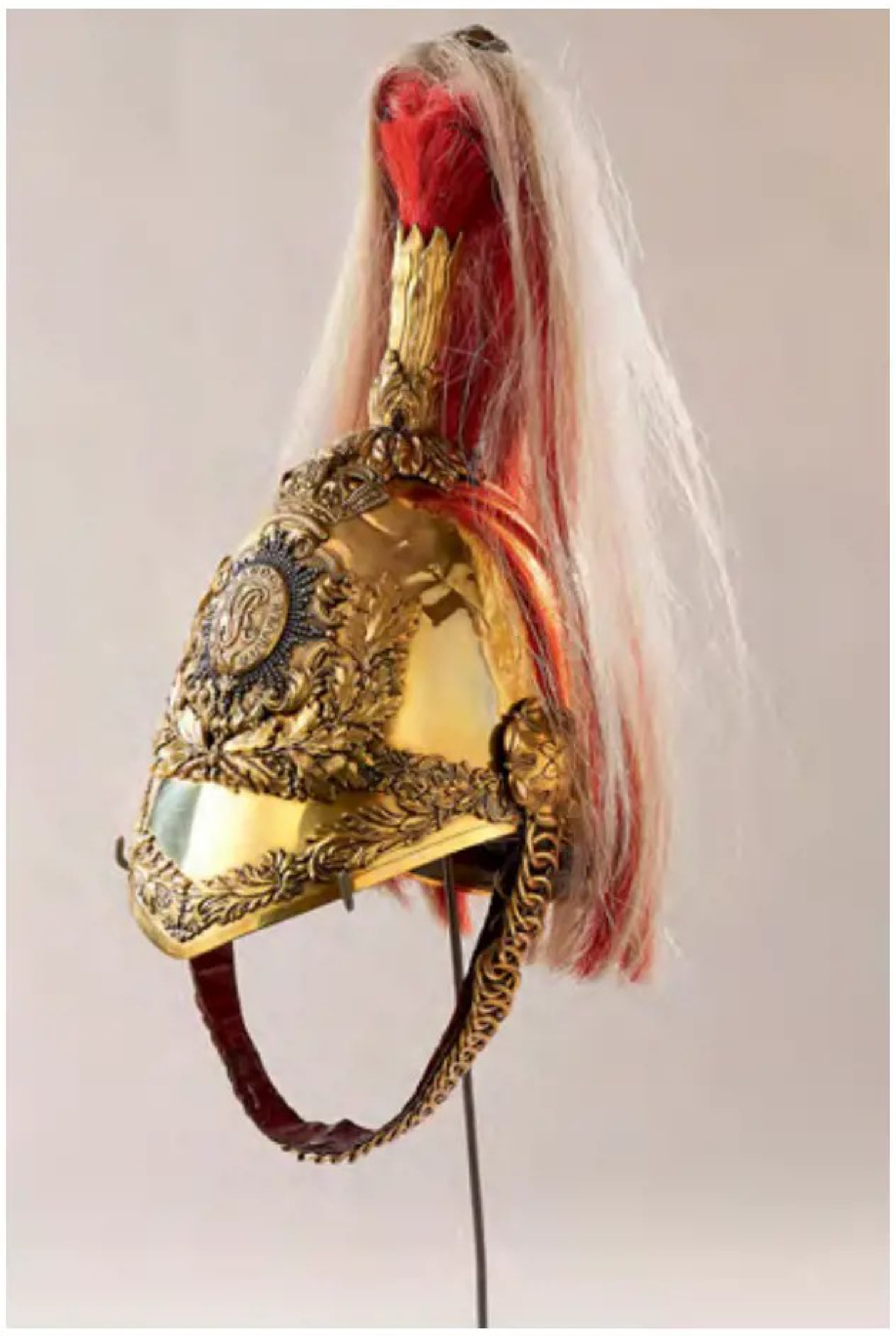
Speaking to *Britain at War*, Learning and Engagement manager Allison Lynn said: "The first area, 'Roll Call', orients the visitor and introduces our three regiments – the Royal Yorkshire Regiment, Prince of Wales's Own Regiment of Yorkshire and the Royal Dragoon Guards – and their antecedents: the 4th Royal Irish Dragoon Guards, The 5th (Princess Charlotte of Wales's) Dragoon Guards, The 6th (Inniskilling) Dragoons, The 7th (The Princess Royal's) Dragoon Guards, the 5th Royal Inniskilling Dragoon Guards and the 4th/7th Royal Dragoon Guards, the East Yorkshire Regiment (Duke of York's Own), and the West Yorkshire Regiment (Prince of Wales's Own)."

In Roll Call, visitors can also find informative displays that explain the historic roles of the antecedent regiments: infantry, cavalry or, later, armour. Uniformed mannequins visualise these differences, and include a Waterloo soldier

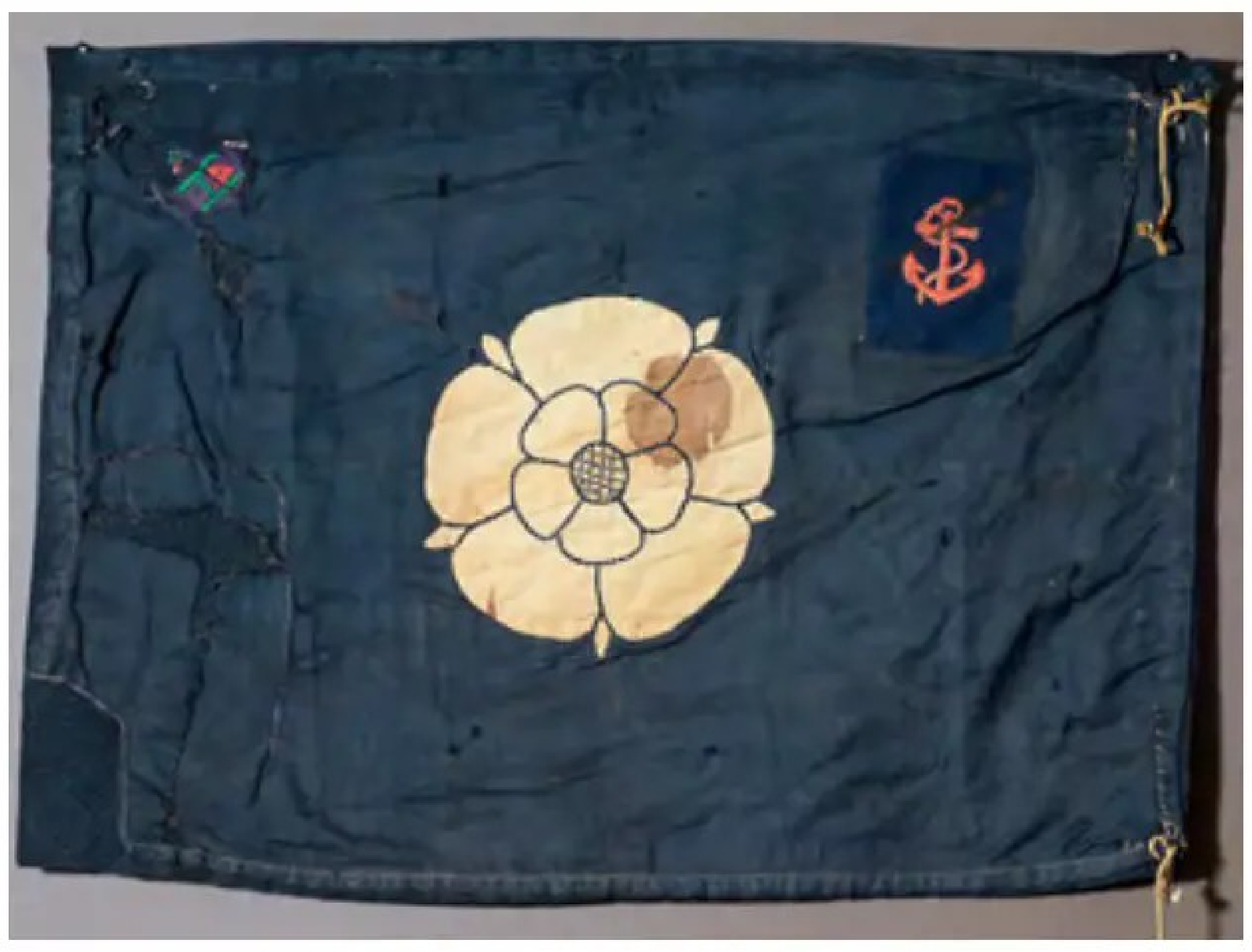


A panel cutaway of a Sherman. Many Yorkshiremen, especially those in Dragoon Regiments, became 'tankies' in World War Two

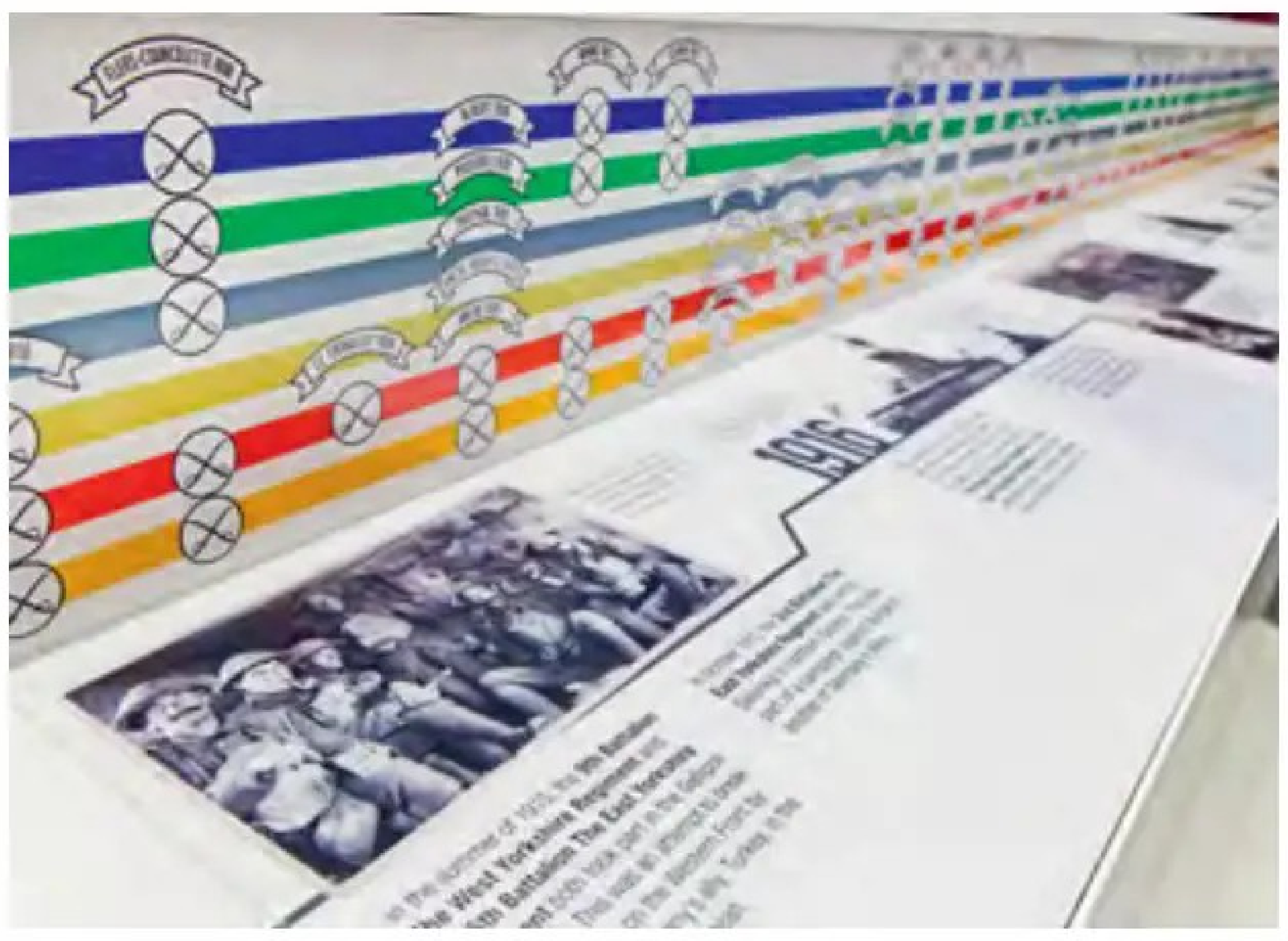
The interior of the York Army Museum and its uniformed statues
IMAGES COURTESY OF YORK ARMY MUSEUM



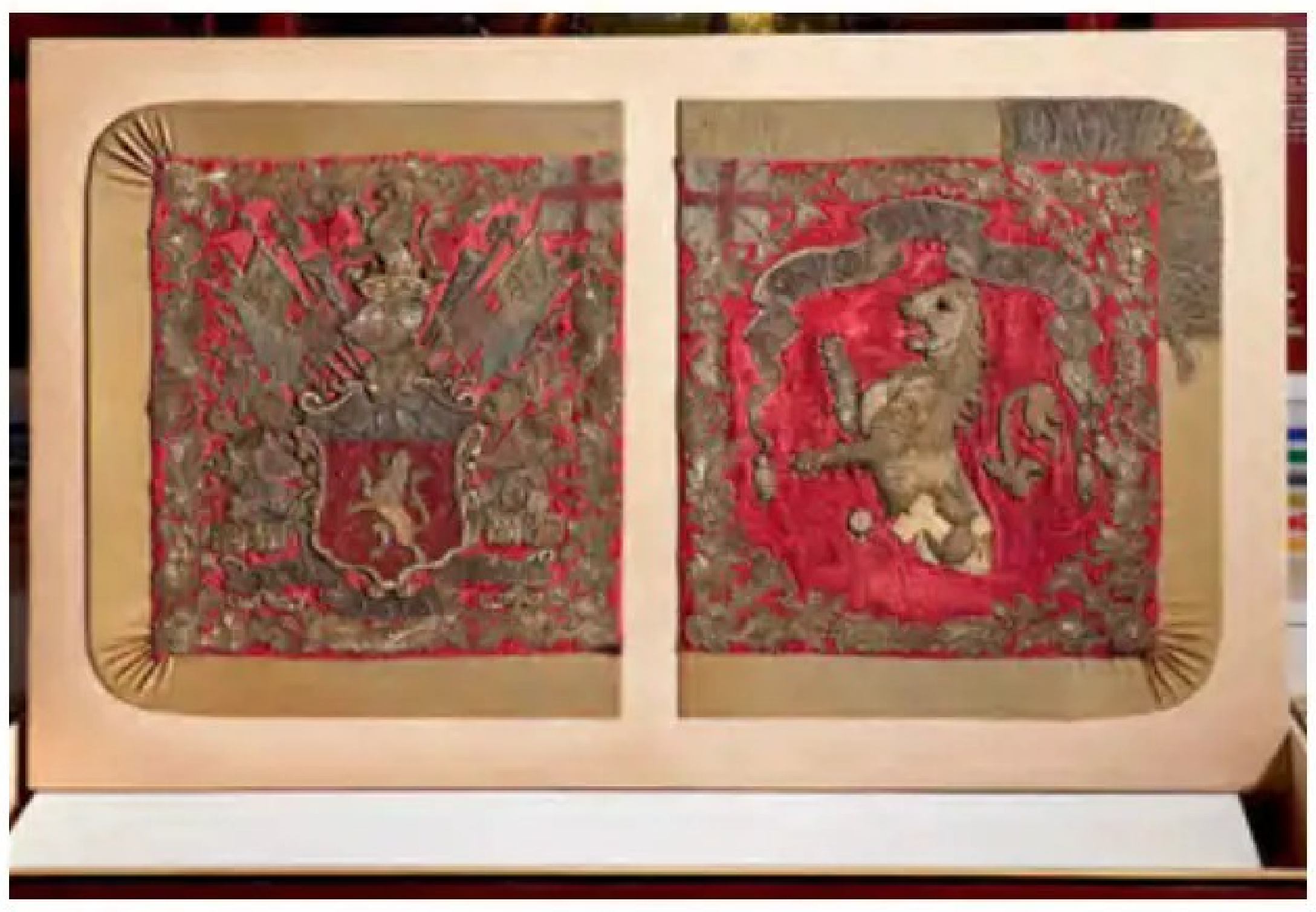
General James Scarlett's battle-damaged helmet. During the Crimean War, Scarlett led the charge of the Heavy Brigade at the Battle of Balaclava. The attack was overshadowed by the disastrous Charge of the Light Brigade



A D-Day Pennant from the 2nd East Yorkshire Regiment, which was carried ashore on Sword Beach on June 6, 1944



A colour-coded timeline in the 'Lines of Fire' area, tracing the story, campaigns and various amalgamations of the museum's regiments from 1685 through to 2015



The Dettingen Standard, the oldest surviving British cavalry standard. At the Battle of Dettingen in 1743, Cornet Henry Richardson defended the standard and refused to allow it to be taken by the French

and a World War One cavalry trooper astride a horse.

From here, guests move into the 'Lines of Fire'. "This area tells the story of our regiments, their campaigns and various amalgamations from 1685 through to 2015," said Allison. A colour-coded timeline traces this history, presented alongside a series of archival photographs. Nearby, the Dettingen Standard hangs conserved and mounted for all to see, while the Crimean War is brought to life through the Dragoon helmet of General James Yorke Scarlett. The steel is indented by numerous Russian sabre blows, a consequence of the fierce fighting encountered while Scarlett led the successful Heavy Brigade charge at the Battle of Balaclava.

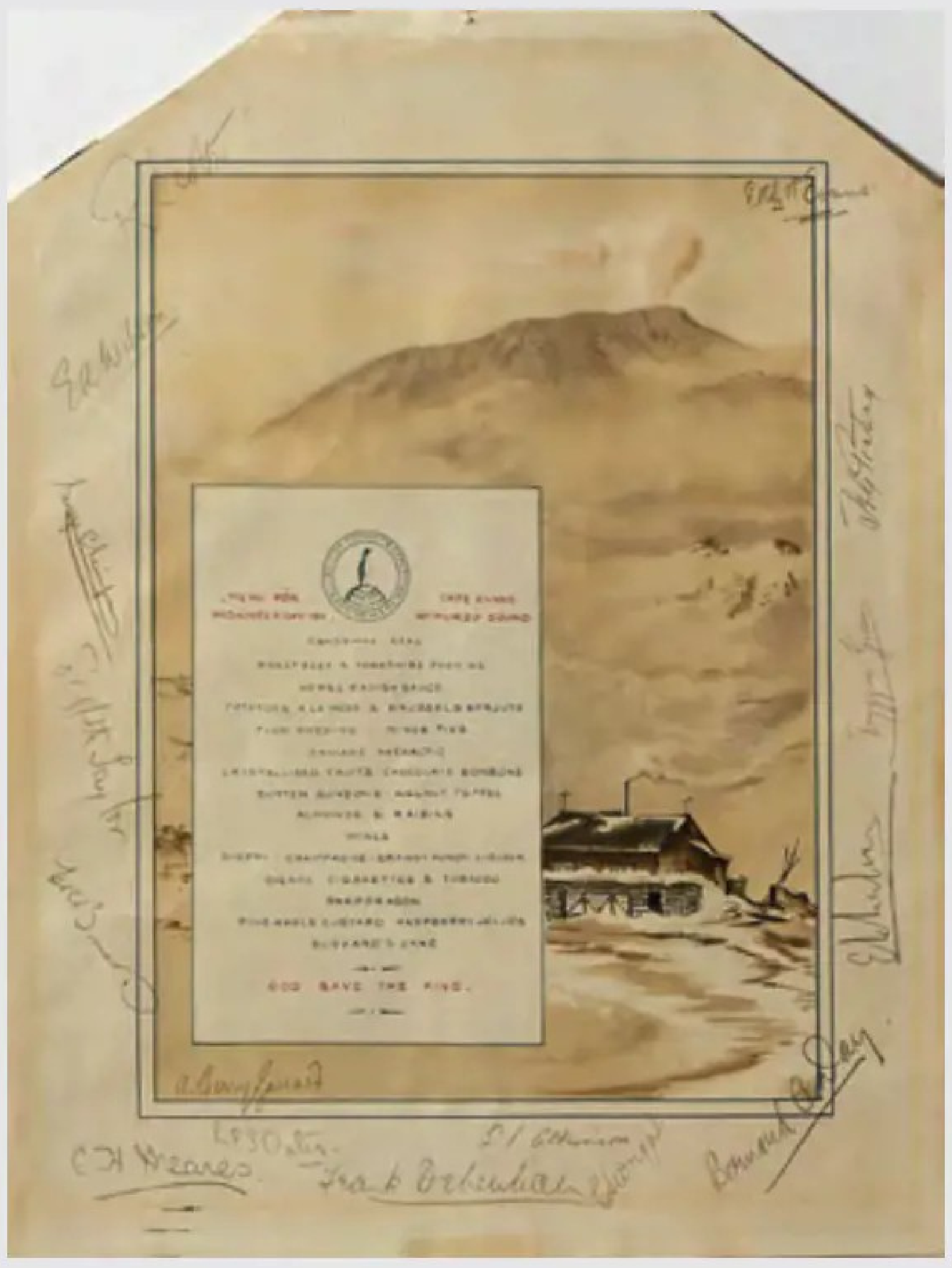
Alongside exhibits devoted to World War One, the Napoleonic Wars, Korea and beyond, World War Two also features heavily. Here, visitors can find the D-Day Pennant of the 2nd Battalion, East Yorkshire Regiment. Allison said: "In the spring of 1944, the Yorks were camped at Waterlooville, Hampshire, where women of the Women's Voluntary Service [WVS] were also stationed. Members of the WVS sewed flags embroidered with the White Rose of Yorkshire and gave one to each company of the 2nd Battalion, as well as to the battalion HQ. These pennants were carried ashore on Sword Beach on D-Day and provided a rallying point for the advancing men."

In 'The Sharp End', visitors discover how a soldier's essential kit has changed since the 17th century. Weapons, uniforms, rations, saddlery and field equipment are set side-by-side, allowing visitors to directly compare the evolution of flintlock musket with assault rifle, or scarlet tunic with the Personal Clothing System Combat Uniform.

Moving on, the fourth area of the museum – 'Regimental Ties' – explores the community behind the uniforms, with a large, interactive, officer's mess table explaining the role of spirit, community and memory in uniting soldiers and their

## Learning & Engagement Manager's Favourite

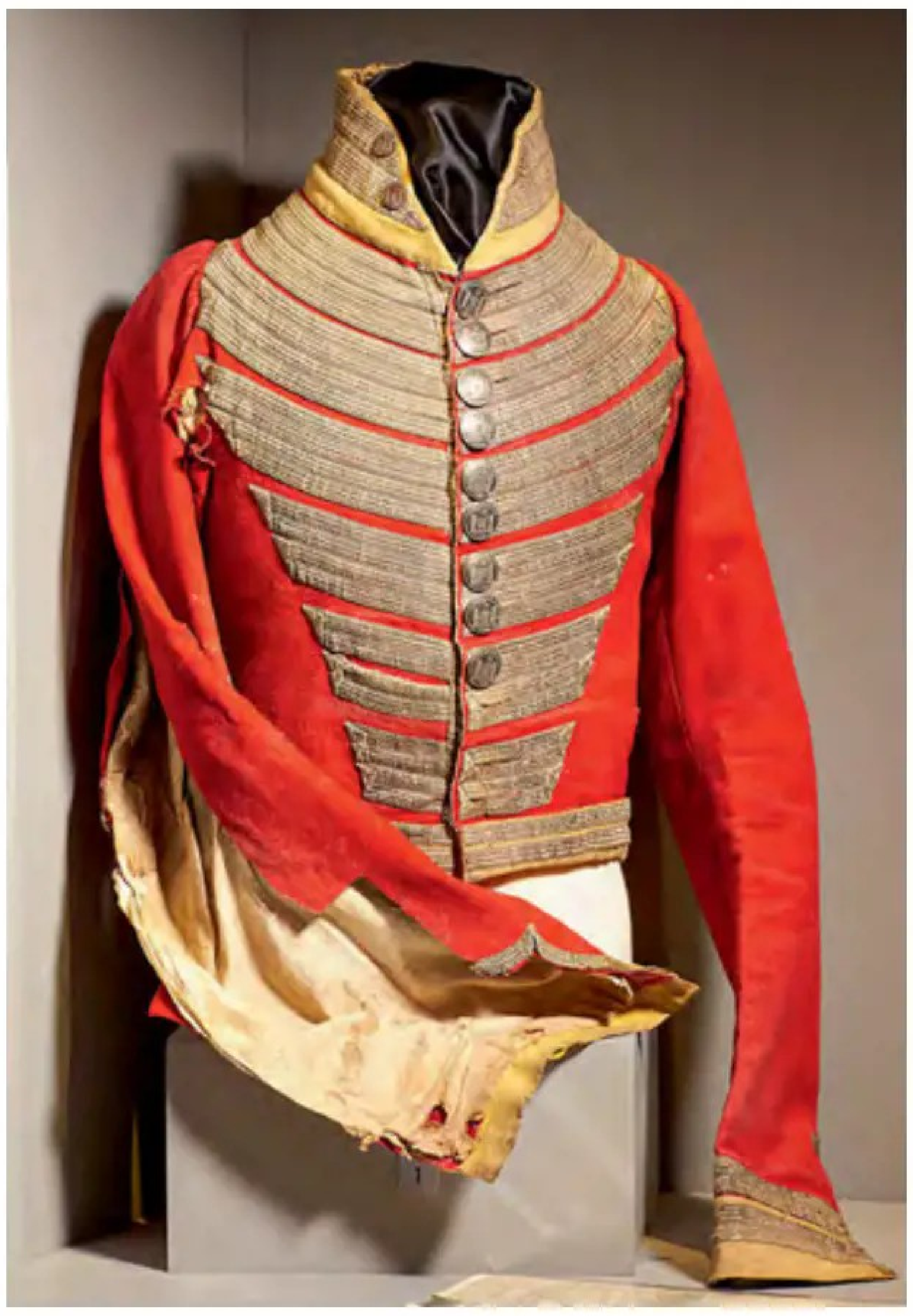
"I'd choose a menu from the Terra Nova Expedition, detailing the Midwinter's Day meal served at Cape Evans on June 21, 1911. It is signed by all members of Scott's Antarctic Expedition, including Captain Lawrence 'Titus' Oates, formally of the 6th Inniskilling Dragoons. During the return journey, the expedition was struck by harsh blizzards. Captain Oates suffered severe frostbite and knew his condition would limit the party's survival. Oates left the camp on March 17, 1912, his 32nd birthday, uttering the famous words: 'I am just going outside and may be some time.' He was never seen again."



GOD SAVE THE KING.

Trying on uniforms in 'The Yorkshire Soldier' area, a zone that explores how soldiers' kit has changed since the 17th century

Captain Lawrence 'Titus' Oates' medals: a Polar Medal and Queen's South Africa Medal



This short, close-fitting jacket, known as a coatee, belonged to Captain Browne, a cavalry officer who served with the 6th Inniskilling Dragoons at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815

While serving on the Western Front, Private George Raithby of the West Yorkshire Regiment pressed two poppy flowers between the pages of his leather notebook. The petals survive today

families. Displayed here are the medals of Captain Lawrence 'Titus' Oates, the ill-fated polar explorer who served in both the West Yorkshire Regiment and the 6th Inniskilling Dragoons before joining Captain Scott's Terra Nova Expedition. Oates' Polar Medal and Queen's South Africa Medal are displayed alongside pieces of his uniform.

'Soldering On' focuses on troops' experience in battle; visitors can read first-hand accounts of some of the most testing conditions faced by Yorkshiremen serving on campaign from Waterloo to World War Two. One item to look out for is the scarlet coatee of Captain William Browne of the 6th Inniskilling Dragoons. Allison said: "During the Battle of Waterloo, Browne's horse was killed under him, and he was injured seven times. The surgeon treating Browne had to cut open the right-hand sleeve of the coatee, and the lining is still stained with the cavalryman's blood."

The tattered uniform rests beside the Victoria Crosses of three Yorkshire heroes – Private John Cunningham, Sergeant Albert Mountain and Second Lieutenant Jack Harrison – while visitors can view a film featuring actors from the Scarborough Theatre reading the men's VC citations. Other treasures include two faded poppy flowers pressed between the pages of Private George Rathiby's World War One notebook, and the poignant personal artefacts of an unknown soldier of the West Yorkshire Regiment, recovered from the Western Front.

The last permanent gallery is called 'The Yorkshire Soldier'. Here, visitors discover how the past 300 years have influenced the evolution of the modern soldier. "This section has modern kit and uniform for visitors to try on, a shooting range simulator based on the army's annual combat marksmanship test, and a series of display cases for both regimental collections to highlight new acquisitions," Allison said.

The York Army Museum offers a fascinating tour through more than three centuries of Yorkshire's storied military history, documenting the achievements of 11 historic regiments and the poignant, personal stories of those who fought under their colours. A must-visit location. BW

A large, interactive, officer's mess table in the 'Regimental Ties' section, explaining the role of spirit, community and memory in uniting soldiers and their families

## Visitor information

The York Army Museum is open Monday to Saturday, 10am to 5pm. Closed for Christmas December 21, 2025, to January 4, 2026.

**Admission:** Adult £8, Under 18 £4, Under 5 Free, Concession £6

**Address:** York Army Museum, 3 Tower Street, York, YO1 9SB

**What3words location:** liver.exist.slice

**Closest station:** York Station (0.7 miles)

Tel: 01904 633830

**Email:** contact@yorkarmymuseum.co.uk

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# IMAGE *of* WAR

## Airfix Airspeed

RAF Brize Norton, Oxfordshire, April 26, 1944

Civilian workers of No.6 Maintenance Unit (6 MU) find a moment in their busy schedule for a light-hearted photograph with their life-size 'model kit' – actually an Airspeed Horsa, a largely wooden, troop-carrying glider. An aircraft storage unit, 6 MU would receive new aircraft from manufacturers or maintain/repair those from other units before putting them into storage, and, when needed for service, retrieving them and readying them to fly. In April 1944, in the build-up to June's Normandy invasion, 6 MU was busied assembling some of the 258 or so Horsas allocated to the invasion's British airborne element – Operation Tonga. The Horsa was designed with its construction in mind, and it arrived from the manufacturer in 30 pre-painted sub-assemblies. Those who quietly chuckle at the likeness to a giant Airfix kit may be reassured that the connection could well have been made in 1944, as the iconic modelmaker was first founded in 1939!

OFFICIAL PHOTOGRAPH

# Canada's big cat adventurer

Despite Canada's large contribution to the Korean War, just one of its naval pilots served in the conflict. Andrew Thomas profiles the Ontarian who flew Panthers from USS *Oriskany*

When USS *Oriskany* – the last completed Essex-class aircraft carrier – joined Task Force 77 off the east coast of Korea on November 2, 1952, in addition to a squadron of F4F-5 Corsairs and one of AD-4 Skyraiders, the ship's air group included two squadrons flying the F9F-5 Panther jet fighter. One of these was VF-781 (later VF-121) and among its pilots was a Canadian, Lieutenant Joseph James MacBrien.

Known usually as Joe or John, MacBrien was born in Toronto on February 20, 1925, and the future Olympian was a veteran of World War Two, having enlisted in 1942. He was initially a navigation officer serving on Royal and Royal Canadian Navy ships before, in 1946, training as a pilot.

When war on the Korean peninsula erupted in June 1950, Royal Canadian Navy destroyers were despatched in just 11 days and the first three were on station by the end of the summer.

Canada, despite having just nine destroyers on strength at the time, maintained rotations of three throughout the conflict. More than 3,600 Canadian sailors served in the Korean War, with the last withdrawing in September 1955, long after the 1953 armistice. However, Canada's aircraft carrier, HMCS *Magnificent* – a Majestic-class vessel loaned by the UK – was committed to NATO duties and due for refit, so never deployed to Korea.

That meant Canada's naval aviators missed out entirely on the conflict…

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109
F9F-5
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VF 781

BELOW: **Flown by Royal Canadian Navy aviator Lieutenant Joe MacBrien, F9F-5 Panther 126034/D 109 of VF-781 picks up the arrester wire on USS *Oriskany* on November 15, 1952** IMAGES COURTESY OF THE USN UNLESS NOTED OTHERWISE except for Joe MacBrien. On an exchange tour with the US Navy, MacBrien was aboard *Oriskany* as a qualified Air Warfare Officer and was appointed as the VF-781's Weapons Training Officer, a key role in the conflict as the unit's tasks included both air-to-air and ground attack missions. For the latter, and in addition to the jet's four internal 20mm cannon, the Panther typically carried a pair of 500lb bombs and up to six 250lb bombs that could be fitted with a 4ft fuze extender to maximise the blast effect.

MacBrien recalled his early sorties: "Each combat mission was a unique task that demanded and received the undivided attention of all those involved; in that sense boredom was not a problem. However, all of us did settle into a somewhat monotonous routine of sleeping, eating and flying. I can well remember my first mission over enemy-held territory, it was an armed reconnaissance on November 4, 1952. We attacked a lumber yard and a solitary truck with indifferent results."

This set the routine, with interdiction missions to attack communist communications being the norm, but with the enemy generally moving at night, little was seen. Most sorties lasted for two hours or less, and after one mission on November 15, MacBrien's landing on *Oriskany* was dramatically captured by a photographer as his Panther engaged the cable.

## MiGs!

On November 18, 1952, a routine sortie became anything but, as MacBrien recounted: "I flew a combat air patrol in the forenoon when the force was operating off the east coast of Korea about 100 miles south of the Soviet naval base at Vladivostok. The cloud cover began at just 500ft and a blizzard was driving snow over the deck. There had been numerous radar contacts that morning well to the north; none approached the force, and we had an uneventful CAP.

"Shortly after we had been relieved and landed aboard, a new radar contact was detected, range 35 miles and closing. One of the four CAP aircraft had experienced a fuel pump failure and was forced to remain at low altitude; the three remaining aircraft were vectored out to intercept and minutes later the flight leader visually identified seven MiGs high overhead.

"The MiGs initiated an attack and within seconds an unco-ordinated melee developed. Our pilots gave a good account of themselves; one F9 was damaged but our pilots were credited with two MiGs confirmed and one damaged. One F9 actually orbited an enemy pilot descending into the water by parachute."

ABOVE: **Flying with a USN squadron, Lieutenant Joe MacBrien was the only RCN pilot to fly operationally during the Korean War**

The dogfight appeared to have broken the spirit of the attacking MiGs and they disengaged. MacBrien continued: "Neither side sought any further contact although there was a great deal of enemy activity near the position of the parachute; this included a slow-moving radar target assumed

*"Minutes later the flight leader visually identified seven MiGs high overhead. The MiGs initiated an attack and within seconds an unco-ordinated melee developed"*

Lieutenant Joe MacBrien, RCN

ABOVE: **F9F Panthers, including D106 of VF-781, on *Oriskany's* snow-covered deck off the Korean coast**

to be a rescue aircraft. We spent the afternoon at general quarters ready to launch, and although there were two more MiG sightings by CAPs the enemy did not close on the Task Force and there was no further contact. By late afternoon the enemy activity had ceased, and the radar screen was clear."

The successful American pilots that day were Lieutenant Elmer Williams and Lieutenant (JG) John Middleton, who were each credited with one MiG 15 destroyed, with Williams also being given one probable. MacBrien concluded: "An exciting day with gratifying results – particularly in view of the disparity in numbers and aircraft performance."

However, it was not until 2002 that full story was declassified. Then, it was revealed that four MiGs had in fact been shot down – three of them by Williams. The seven MiGs that had attacked the USN Panthers had been Soviet aircraft and clearly identified by their red stars. They were flown by Russian pilots from Zolotaya Dolina air base near Vladivostok. Williams described the first combat: "He went into the sun and I lost him, then I saw the leader and wingman come around for a diving attack on me. I turned into them and fired at the leader. He turned away and the wingman rolled down on me, and we went past belly-to-belly as I raked him with a long burst. He went down in fire."

A lengthy combat then ensued in which three MiGs flown by Kapitáns Belyakov and Vandalov and Leytenant Pakhomkon were shot down, while Leytenant Tarshinov was killed when his crippled MiG crashed on landing. Williams managed to fly his badly damaged Panther safely back to the aircraft carrier.

## Firestarters

John MacBrien was busy through December 1952, participating in several strikes against major industrial targets on the Yalu River, in particular one against the hydro-electric installations at Hyesanjin in the Paektu Mountains on the Chinese border.

He recalled: "The ADs [Skyraiders] went in two waves, with the fighters providing strike escort while the ADs were en route, and then a high and low TARCAP (Target Combat Air Patrol) over the

RIGHT: **One of the MiG-15s shot down by VF-781 on November 18, 1952, streams smoke as it dives toward its destruction**

RIGHT: **With F4U-5N Corsairs on deck, USS *Oriskany* sails through heavy seas off Korea on January 10, 1953**

RIGHT: **A F9 makes its final turn to approach *Oriskany*'s deck**

target itself. I was part of the high TARCAP; we saw contrails high above the other side of the river which we assumed were MiGs, [but] they did not cross the river and we were not permitted to penetrate Manchuria. The two groups continued to orbit a watch over each other, but there was no contact."

Other than brief periods for replenishment, USS *Oriskany* remained in action over the winter. On February 1, 1953, it mounted a mission for which Joe MacBrien was awarded the American DFC. He later described what happened: "I was scheduled as a section leader in a strike by eight aircraft on a supply area near the town of Pukchong. The strike was to be led by our squadron commander, with our operations officer leading the second division. However, when we started engines, they both had mechanical problems and could not launch.

"The ship told me what had happened just after my wingman and I were launched. I was now leading the strike, and two standbys were being launched to bring the attack flight up to the intended strength. The spares joined up, we had a quick reorganisation by radio and then departed for the target area on schedule.

"Our bombing was very accurate; the damage done during our first run was such that I was able to move the aiming point for subsequent runs. The flight scored a number of direct hits and, as we left the target, we were able to count at least five separate fires.

"My luck continued. One of our photo aircraft was using the same tactical radio frequency; he

> ***"Our bombing was very accurate; the damage done during our first run was such that I was able to move the aiming point for subsequent runs. We were able to count at least five separate fires"***
>
> LIEUTENANT JOE MACBRIEN, RCN

BELOW: **With its deck filled and the F9F Panthers forward, the Oriskany conducts a refuelling at sea in 1952**

heard us discussing the damage assessment and asked for the target co-ordinates. Our target area was close to his route, and he was able to expose a few frames as he returned to the task force. At debriefing, our intelligence officer was sceptical of our rather enthusiastic damage assessment claim but a few hours later the photo interpreters settled the matter. They reported no less than seven fires and even more damage than we had claimed. This was without question the most successful mission that I led during my time in Korea."

John MacBrien flew throughout the rest of *Oriskany*'s tour and was the sole Royal Canadian Navy pilot to fly operationally in the conflict: "*Oriskany* flew its final missions on April 25, 1953, and it happened that I was on the last mission. I had accumulated 233 hours and 92 carrier landings in the F9F, and a total of 66 combat missions while we were deployed in Korea."

RIGHT: **As well as interdiction sorties, *Oriskany's* Panthers also flew close air support for Allied troops** USMC

McBrien took up a staff position on his return to Canada and left the Royal Canadian Navy in 1956 with the rank of lieutenant-commander, later joining Canadair Aircraft. However, he returned to the water post-war as a member of the Royal St Lawrence Yacht Club. Heavily involved in yacht racing, for the 1964 Tokyo Olympics he was selected to represent Canada in the three-man dragon class, alongside Ed Botterell and Lynn Watters, placing 11th overall having finished fourth in the first two races. BW

BELOW: **These Panthers from USS *Boxer* above the typical rugged terrain of North Korea over which Joe MacBrien flew**

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# Advanced ack-ack

PLEASE KEEP OFF

Green Mace, a Cold War anti-aircraft gun that was hoped would fend off Soviet bombers, was formidable... on paper. As Ed Webster reveals, perhaps ambition was a refuge of failure

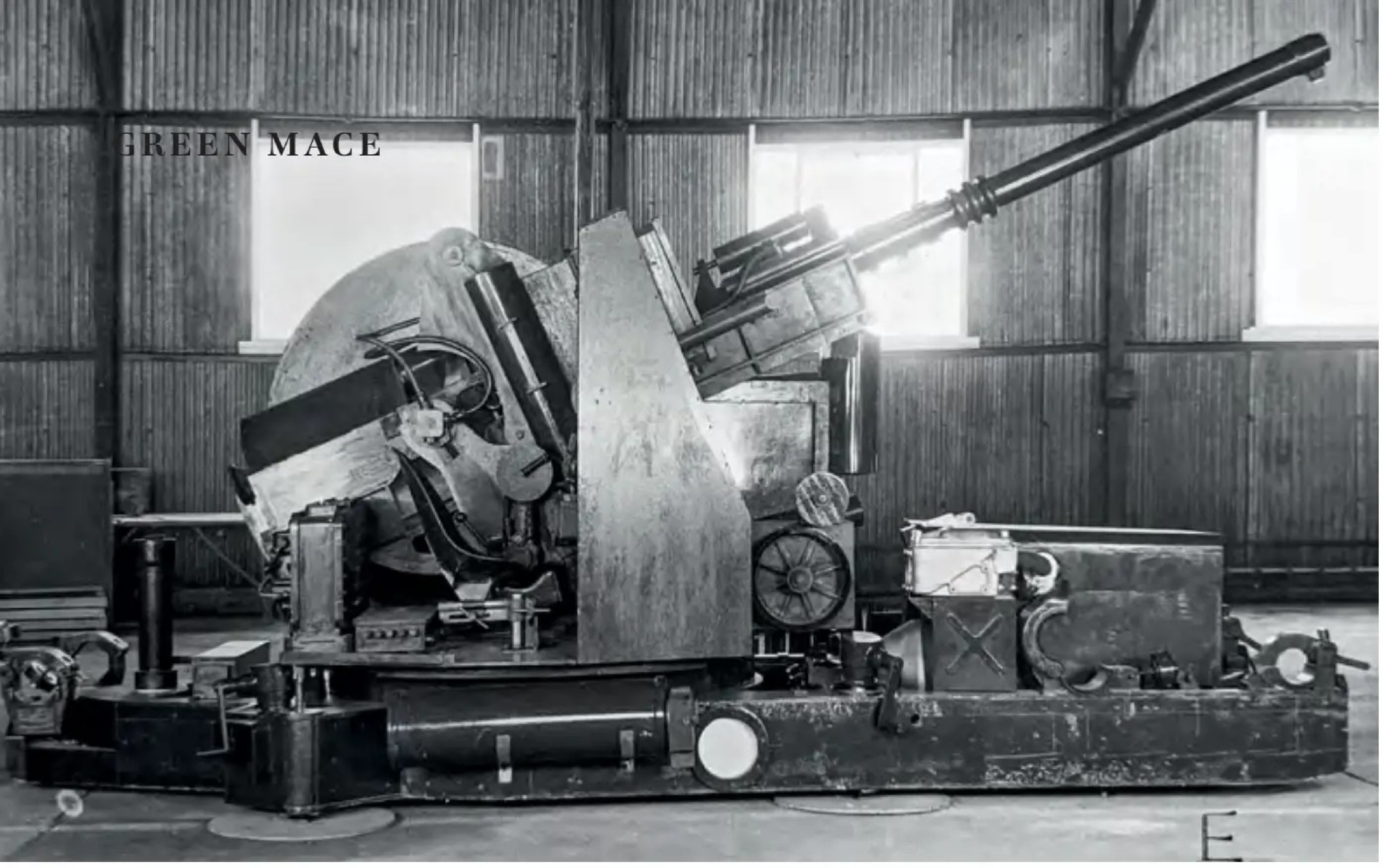
During World War Two, heavy anti-aircraft guns were a cornerstone of strategic defence. In every nation involved in the conflict, cities, factories, ports, bridges, military facilities, all sorts of installations and conurbations vulnerable to mass air attack were protected in part by batteries of heavy guns.

According to the Imperial War Museum, anti-aircraft guns of all types shot down some 300 Luftwaffe aircraft during the Battle of Britain alone. By August 1939, 159 heavy anti-aircraft guns defended London's Inner Artillery Zone, a figure that doubled during the Blitz. Moreover, Operation Diver – the response to Germany's V1 – involved the redeployment of several hundred heavy guns to the southeast to bring down more than 1,800 of the flying bombs. With ever-developing technologies including radar sighting and proximity fuzes, Britain's QF 3.7in and QF 4.5in HAA guns posed a formidable threat to large enemy air raids.

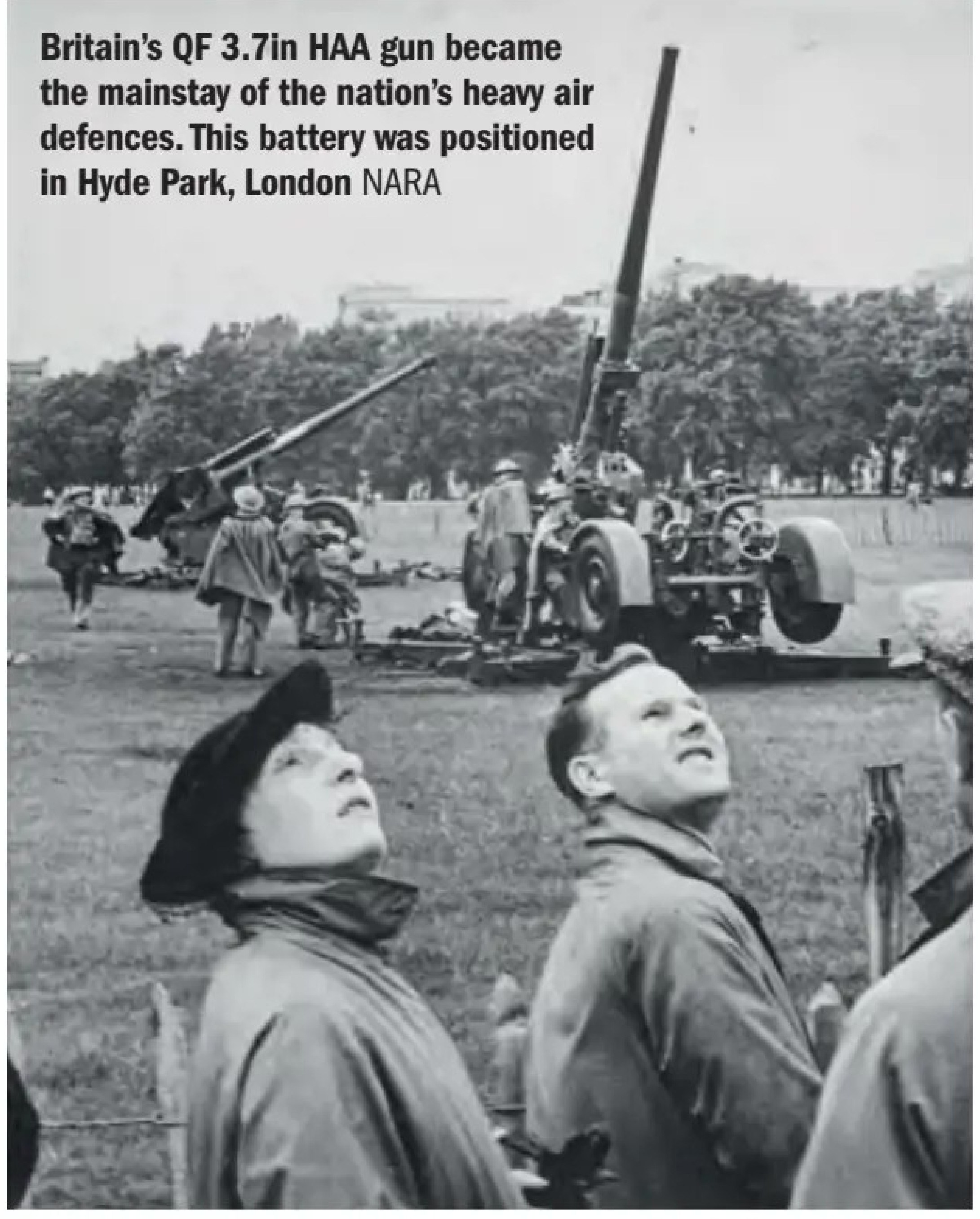
While the bringing down of enemy aircraft was an obvious boon, the main principle of anti-aircraft strategy was to deter or redirect raids, discourage low-level attacks and force aggressor aircraft to deploy munitions from a higher, less accurate altitude. During World War Two, most aircraft lacked the payload to – beyond a lucky hit – single-handedly deal crippling damage to a major target. However, Sir Barnes Wallis's earthquake bombs started to signal change in the sheer quantity of explosive that could be delivered accurately, while Herbert Wagner's Henschel Hs 293 guided missile furnished the Luftwaffe with a stand-off weapon that could hit targets with precision from beyond the range of most anti-aircraft guns.

The 1950s stand out as a period of rapid technological advances and innovation – this is particularly true in aviation. In the Cold War, once truly precise munitions derived from wartime concepts began to be introduced, a single aircraft getting through posed a greater threat by delivering ever more powerful warheads right onto the point of aim. As determined as those pushing the boundaries in aircraft design were those dreaming up more capable means to clear them from the sky. In Britain, among the ambitious projects of the era was Green Mace.

**The sole surviving Green Mace X1E1 gun in 2015**
TONY SYMONDS



LEFT: **The Red Queen 42mm cannon project was intended to replace the Bofors L/60 and boasted a ferocious rate of fire. However, initial interest waned when its pitfalls became apparent** ALL IMAGES VIA AUTHOR UNLESS NOTED OTHERWISE



**Britain's QF 3.7in HAA gun became the mainstay of the nation's heavy air defences. This battery was positioned in Hyde Park, London** NARA

## Wartime benchmark

A heavy anti-aircraft gun developed to counter the evolving aerial threats of the Cold War, Green Mace was a weapons system with plenty of potential: an autoloading gun that could rip apart almost anything it was aimed at, with one gun capable of lobbing more shells skyward than an entire wartime anti-aircraft battery.

To understand Green Mace, we have to go back to World War Two. The British had amassed an effective arsenal of anti-aircraft weapons, which can be crudely divided into three groups. The first were LAA or Light Anti-Aircraft weapons primarily designed to offer protection from fighter-bombers, ground-attack aircraft and low-flying bombers – weapons such as the Bofors and Vickers 40mm cannon and 6-pounder naval anti-aircraft guns. These were normally mobile and moved periodically to new locations around strategic targets such as airfields to be dug in, or towed quickly to support operations.

Opposite these were HAA or Heavy Anti-Aircraft regiments, which started the war with obsolescent QF 3in 20-cwt guns and quickly moved up to the 3.7in, 4.5in and 5.25in guns. These were often positioned in built-up fortified sites or well dug in. Many lacked any form of rapid mobility as they required heavy tractors to relocate the lightest while the heaviest were often installed in dedicated turrets. In the case of the 5.25in, the first were positioned on land in naval-service twin turrets, with single-gun mountings later developed. These guns, the heaviest in Britain's land-based anti-aircraft arsenal, were built to engage bombers at high altitude.

> ***"As determined as those pushing the boundaries in aircraft design were those dreaming up the ever-more capable means to clear them from the sky"***

The third set of weapons comprised ZAA or 'Z' Battery rockets, originally single-rail rocket systems but later expanded to twin- and even 36-rail launchers. Related to the unsuccessful UP rocket mounted on British capital ships, ZAA units were more efficient and, from 1942, were largely crewed by the Home Guard as the projectors were simpler to operate than gun batteries. The launchers were typically installed in fixed locations for air defence, although mobile 'mattress' variants were developed for the surface-to-surface role.

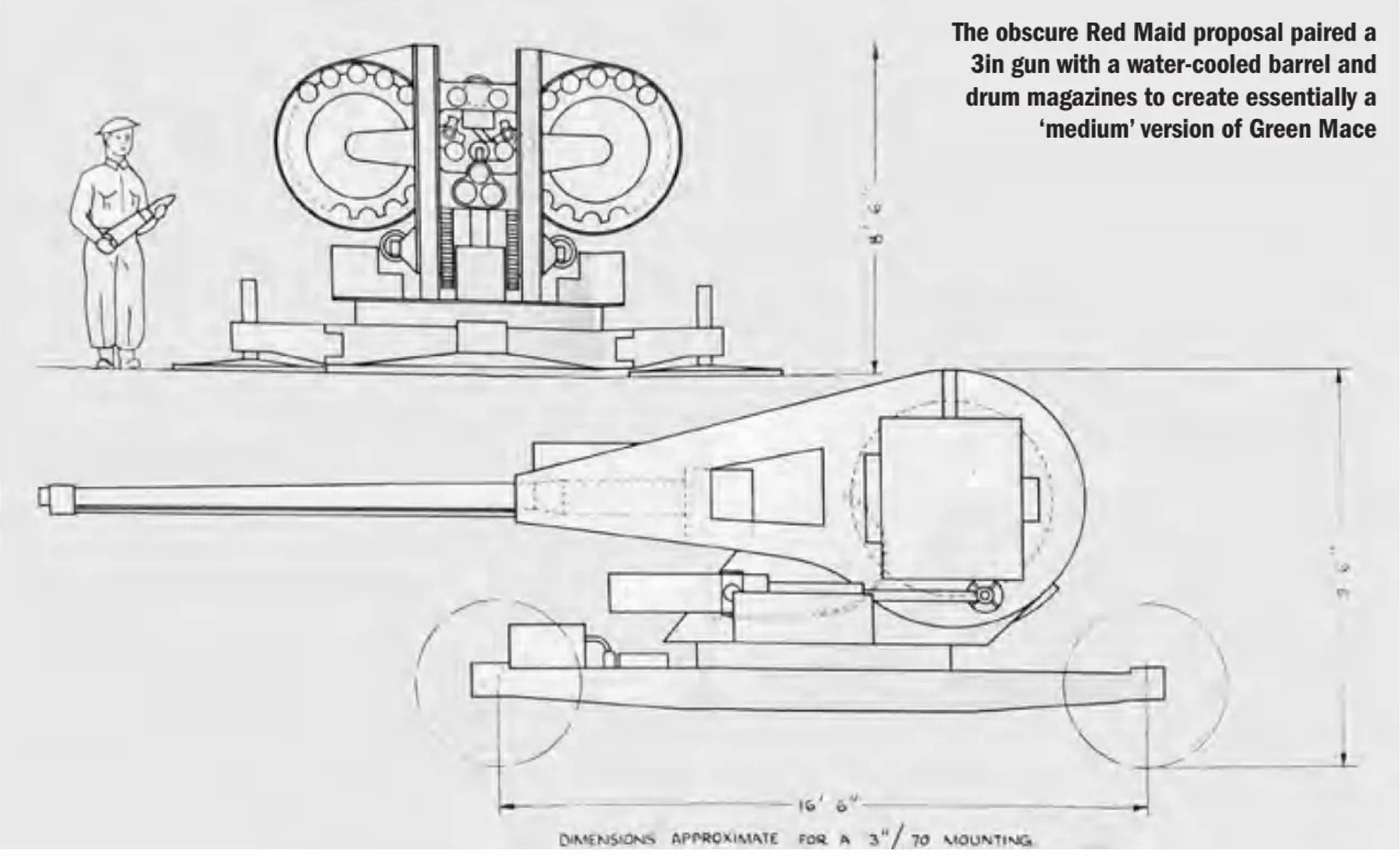
Overall, Britain's anti-aircraft weapons were effective, accounting for greater kill ratios than their German counterparts due to devices like Vickers predictors, reliable proximity fuzes and sighting radars, which all forced German bombers to fly higher and wider to avoid catching flak. Under the brilliant leadership of General Sir Frederick Pile, Anti-Aircraft Command – though part of the Royal Artillery – would be symbiotic with the RAF's Fighter Command and worked mutually rather than as a standalone entity.

## Rate Fixer

Post-war, it became apparent that newer air defence platforms would be needed, recognising the next threat was inevitably going to be the Soviet Union. There was no sign that wartime trends for larger, faster, higher-flying aircraft carrying more potent weapons would subside. Both the Western Allies and the Soviets were introducing a new generation of military aircraft, and the air threat became more pronounced with the advent of nuclear-armed bombers that could fly at altitudes difficult for guns to reach accurately, given shell flight time.

A requirement was issued for a weapon that could not only engage the high-altitude bombers that Russia would bring

**The Swedish-designed Bofors 40mm L/60 (and, post-war, the L/70) was a light, easy to deploy anti-aircraft weapon used by the British and 85 other countries from 1930 and to the present. These gunners practise tracking low-flying Blenheims in November 1939** OFFICIAL PHOTOGRAPH



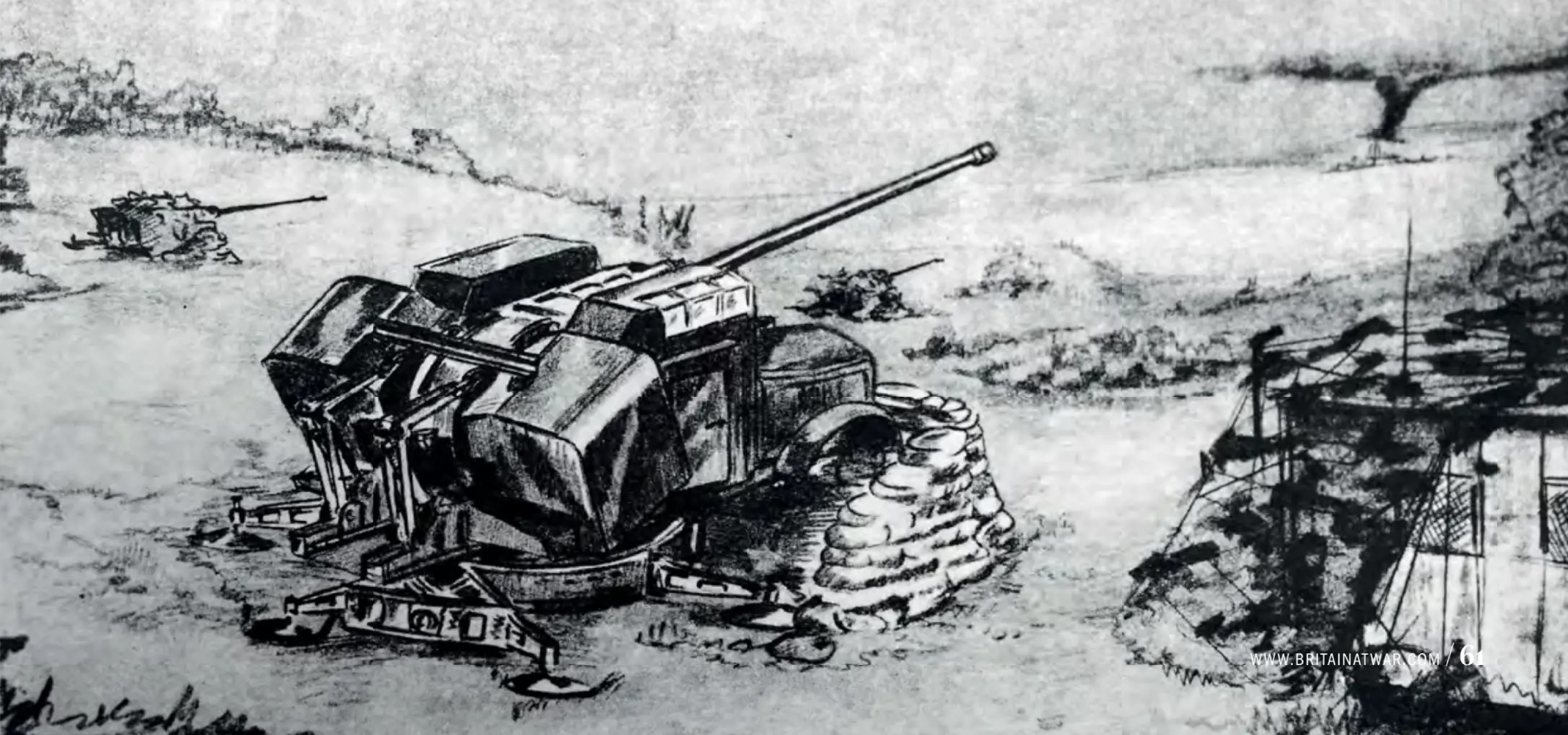
**The obscure Red Maid proposal paired a 3in gun with a water-cooled barrel and drum magazines to create essentially a 'medium' version of Green Mace**

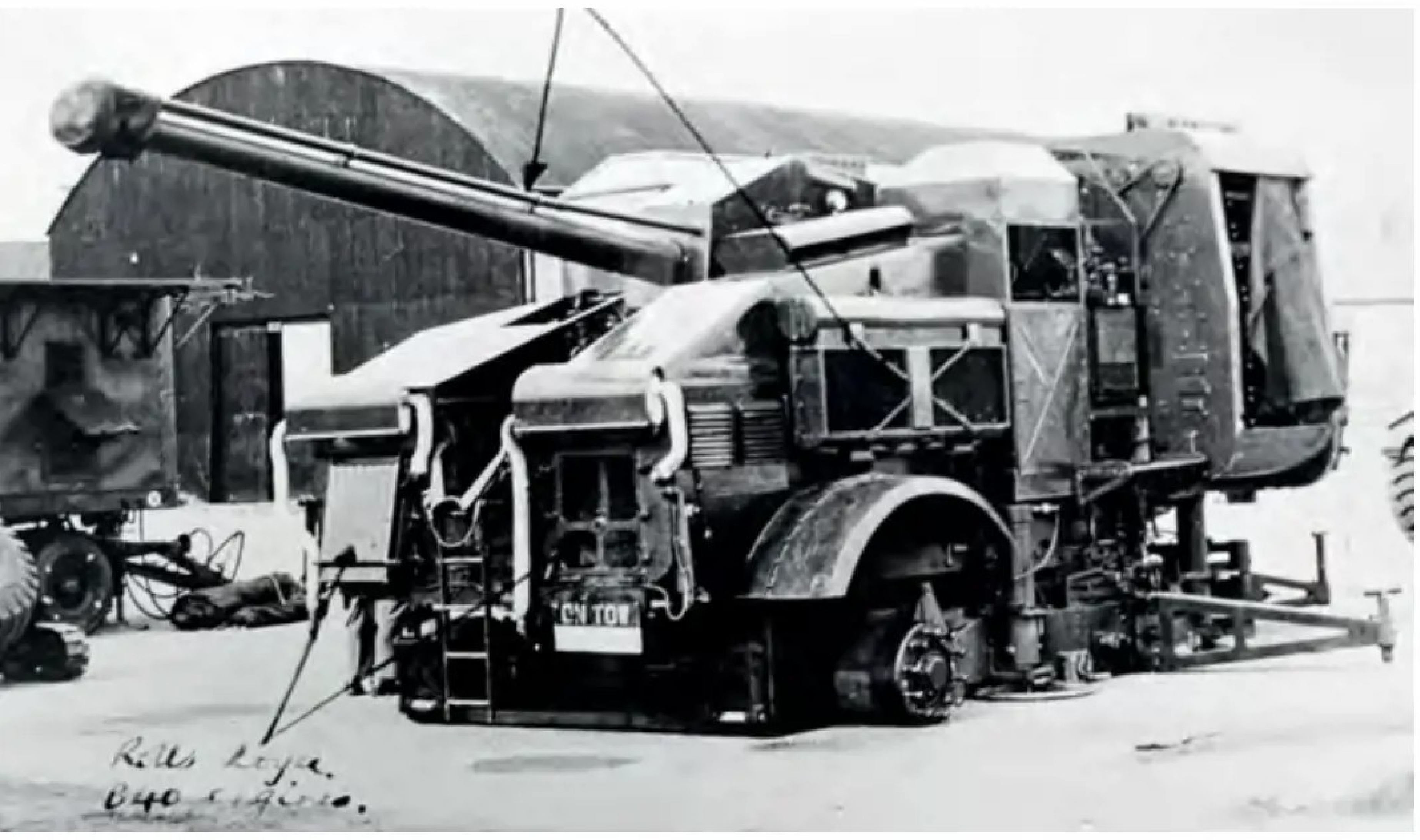
**Green Mace was intended to bring down high-flying Soviet jet bombers such as the 1954-introduced Tu-16 *Badger*. These Tu-16s have been intercepted by a F-8C Crusader and F-4B Phantom from USS *Kittyhawk* in 1962** US NHHC

> *"Though the British had studied guided weapons since before World War Two, they had not fully invested in their potential"*

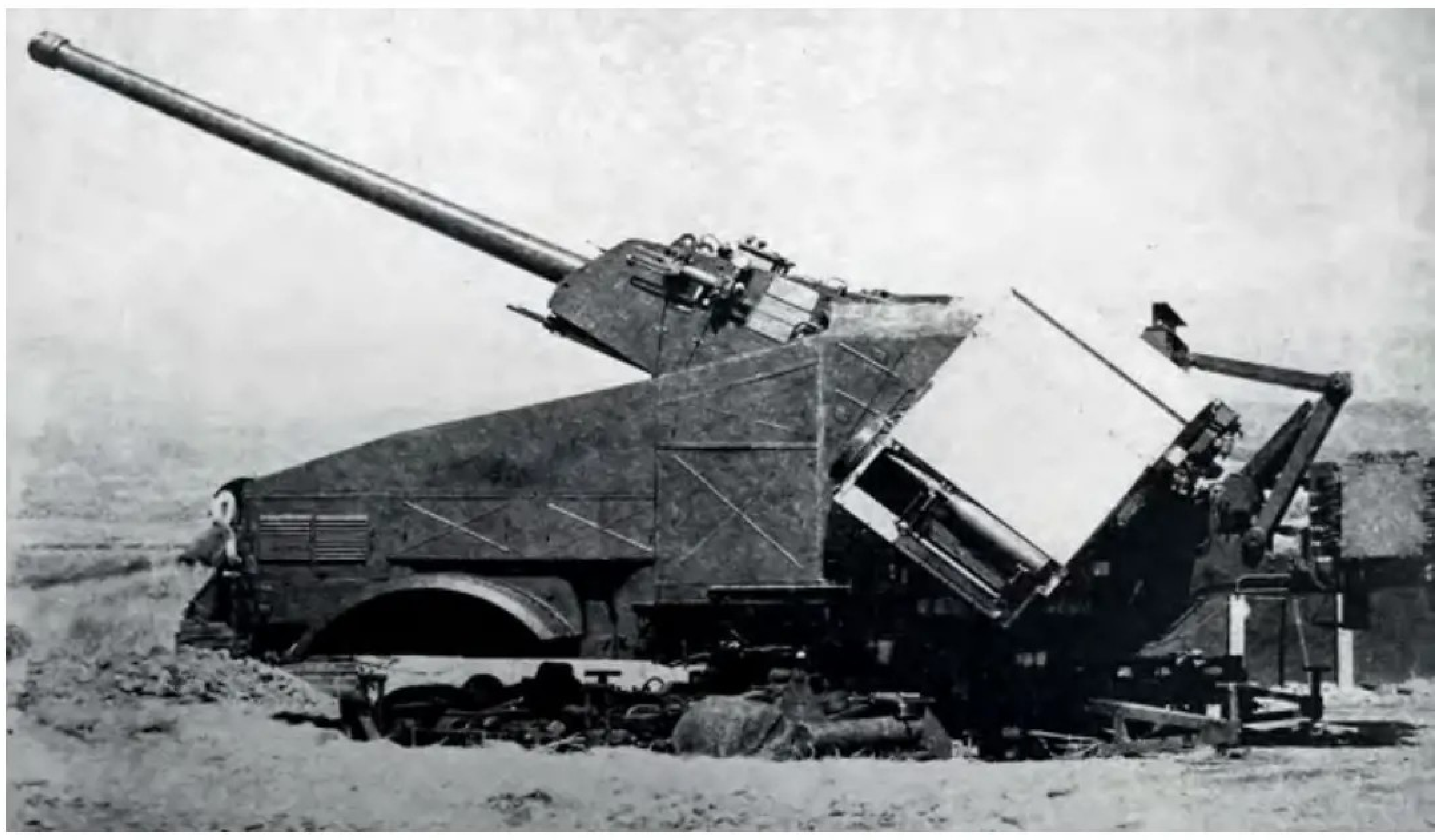
into service, but also fast-moving jets and ground-attack aircraft. A specification for a ground-launched guided missile with the Rainbow codename Red Heathen arrived in 1948. Through a rather convoluted process, this became Red Duster – the Bristol Aeroplane Company's Bloodhound – and Red Shoes – English Electric's Thunderbird. However, although the British had studied guided weapons since before World War Two, they had not fully invested in their potential. This stagnated development, and with tensions reaching a critical point, it was deemed prudent to have an air defence relying on conventional LAA/HAA guns.

The LAA requirement saw several new designs, such as Red King and Red Queen 42mm weapons. The former was developed by Oerlikon, the latter by the Armament Design Establishment. Development began in early 1949 and continued into the 1950s, featuring large circular revolver magazines and radar tracking systems such as Orange Pippin, Green Bacon, Red Indian and Yellow Fever. Ultimately, neither weapon would progress, because while they had a very high rate of fire, they were large, expensive and heavy. Neither could mount radars on the actual platform and after only a trio of three-second bursts the magazines would be empty and in need of a two-minute reload. However, the blow that killed the already waning interest was each system's engagement range of 10,000ft – half of what was required. Instead, the





ABOVE: **The X1E1 Green Mace prototype on its turntable ground base with wheels removed. The annotations denote the water-cooling pipe and radiator for the barrel and the location of the two B40 engines used for powering the vehicle**



ABOVE: **A Green Mace system test, with early box-shaped ammunition bins rather than its distinctive drums. This gun lacks the water-cooling pipe along the barrel, meaning it could be a test of the 5in variant. The system is festooned with measurement devices and includes what is possibly an interim feed arm system at the rear**

Bofors 40mm L/70 become the standard LAA platform.

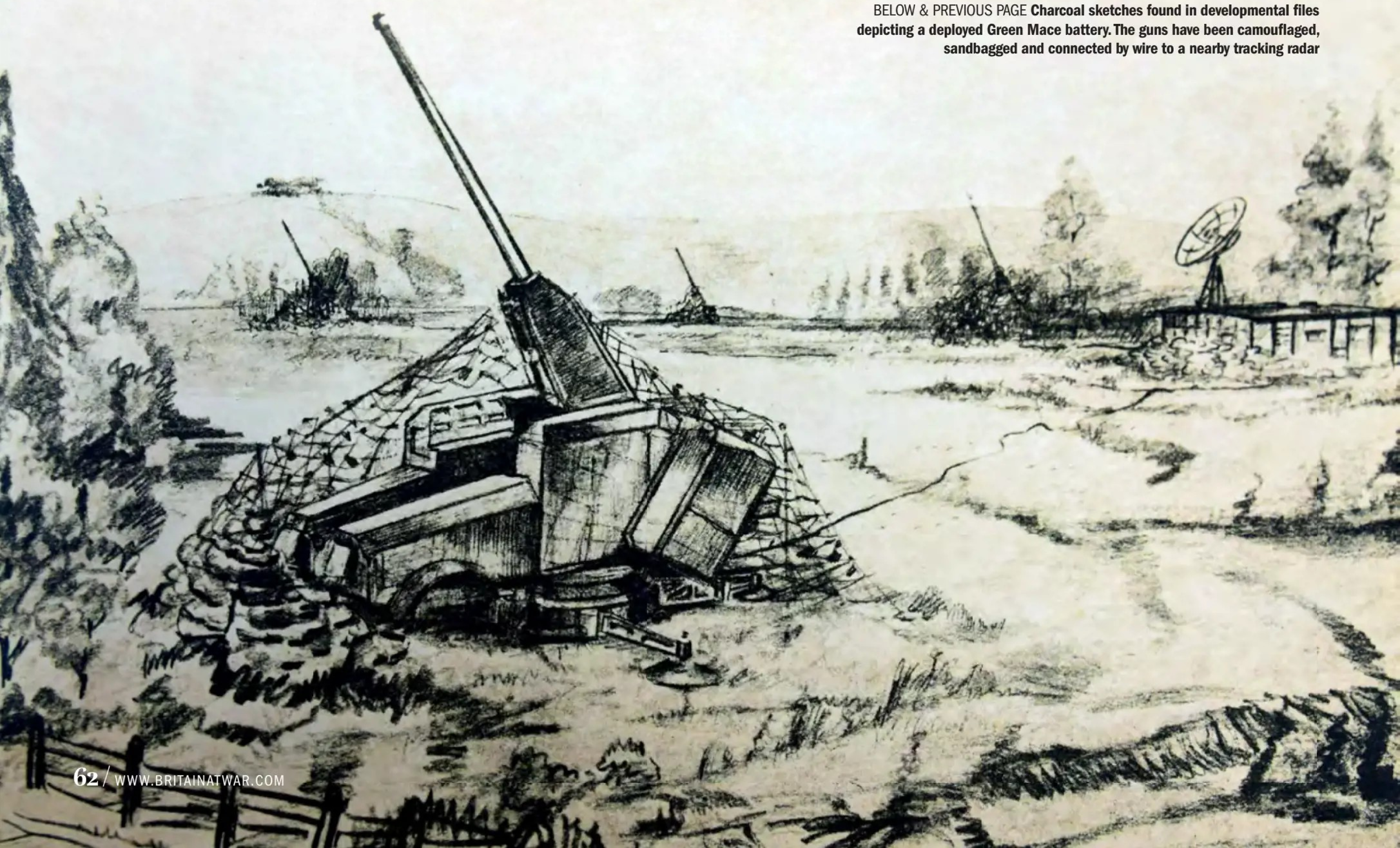
A 'light medium' system had also been in the works since 1948. LMAA weapons were between 57mm and 76mm in calibre and many featured fin-stabilised discarding sabot (FSDS) rounds with fire rates of up to 100rpm. These stood out because many such designs were proposed for mounting on tracked chassis, such as the FV200 and FV300 series of vehicles. The even more obscure Red Maid was mentioned during the FV1201 heavy tractor development as a medium calibre gun featuring drum magazines and a water-cooled barrel.

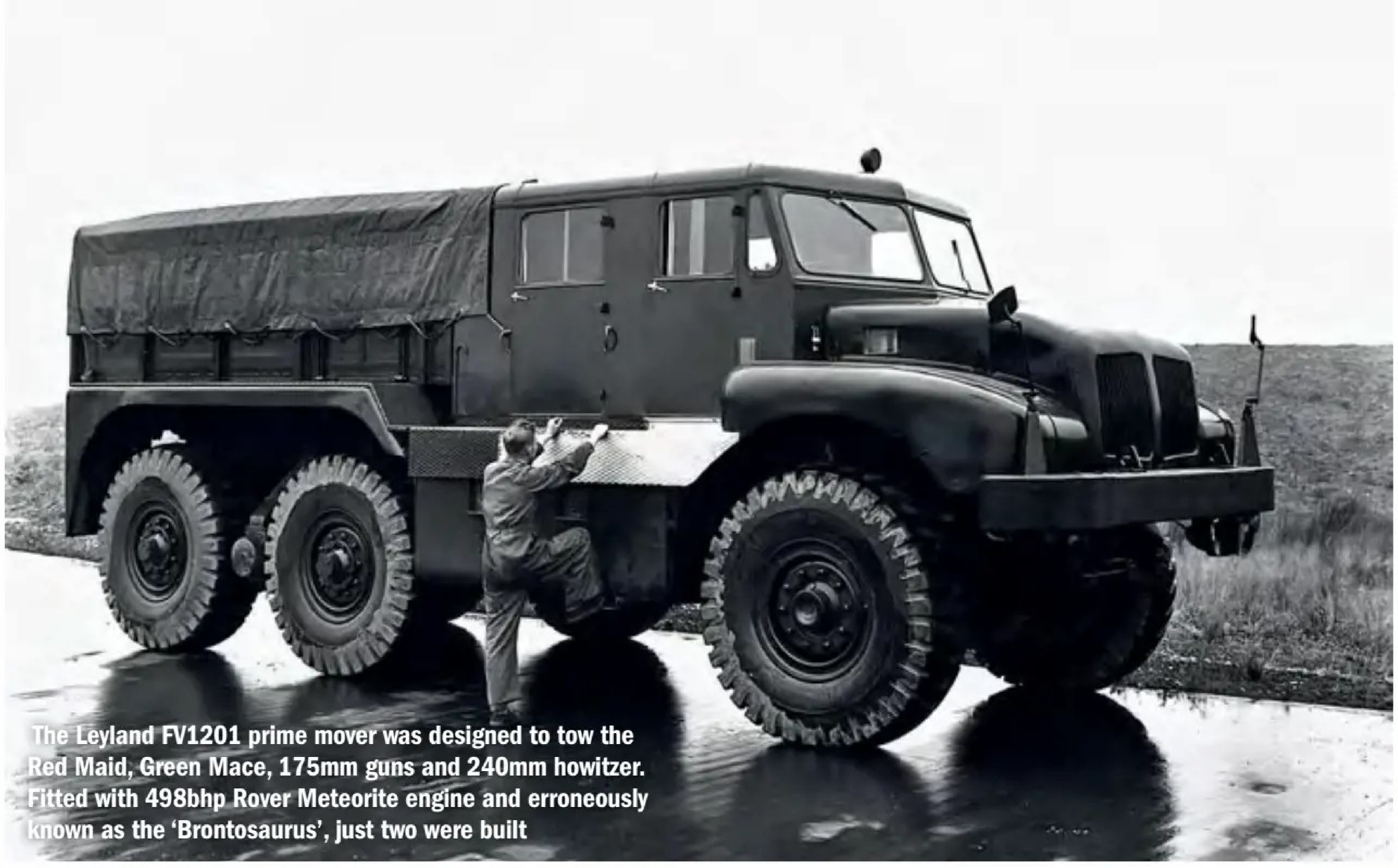
That left the HAA requirement, which led to Green Mace. In 1946, the Rate Fixer study, a programme to enhance the current 3.7in gun's range, fire rate and lethality, was inaugurated. Four systems based on modified 3.7in Mk.VI guns were developed using high-speed loading systems:

- **Ratefixer K** Designed by Captain Kaliwowski and using two drums at 90° to the barrel that fed shells with alternating arms which swung across the central rammer
- **Ratefixer C** Designed by Colonel Carmichael and using a 30-round hopper feeding through a 5in trunnion
- **Ratefixer CR** The same as 'C' but modified to accept a belt feed
- **Ratefixer CN** A 'C' gun with belt feed developed by Frazer Nash. In place of a recoil-operated action, it used hydraulic motors to run feed system

By 1950, it was clear the 3.7in had reached its developmental peak. Aircraft were much quicker and more dangerous than in 1945, so new guns and ammunition were needed to engage them. This led to five more new designs. The first was a 5.25in gun with Probert rifling – a combination rifled/smoothbore barrel that initially provided spin to impart accuracy, then smoothed out to reduce drag. Two more designs exploited the squeeze-bore concept. One, developed by the Armament Research & Development Establishment (ARDE), was 4in to 3in design using a Littlejohn adapter fitted over a 3.7in gun. The other was a Vickers concept for a 4.26in to 3.2in gun also using the Littlejohn and based on the 3.7in.

BELOW & PREVIOUS PAGE **Charcoal sketches found in developmental files depicting a deployed Green Mace battery. The guns have been camouflaged, sandbagged and connected by wire to a nearby tracking radar**




The Leyland FV1201 prime mover was designed to tow the Red Maid, Green Mace, 175mm guns and 240mm howitzer. Fitted with 498bhp Rover Meteorite engine and erroneously known as the 'Brontosaurus', just two were built

The last two concepts proposed using FSDS rounds. A French development, sabot rounds comprised a supportive jacket around a smaller flechette-like projectile to ensure maximum pressure is exploited on firing; the jacket separates after the round exits the barrel, leaving the extremely high-velocity core to run to the target. The first concept was designed by the Chief Engineer Armament Design (CEAD) and utilised a 3in gun with a 2.32in core and a variable timed fuse. The other was a 5in gun firing a round with a 2.78in core with a direct action fuse developed by CEAD.

Despite bringing APDS sabot rounds to service in the middle of the war, the British had paid little heed to the potential of fin-stabilised versions, making no real attempt to implement the technology. However, the Germans had invested heavily in the idea, developing projectiles such as Peenemünde Pfeil Geschoss. However, these sabot rounds were largely designed to deliver an explosive filler and were not akin to today's kinetic energy projectors (APFSDS).

Nevertheless, the German rounds were reverse-engineered, evaluated and replicated. The General Staff issued a specification for a British version in May 1945, stipulating a 1lb explosive filler and a muzzle velocity exceeding 5,000ft/s, achieved with a bored out 5.25in gun. The standard set by PPG rounds was surpassed as the British perfected the new shell.

## An impressive failure

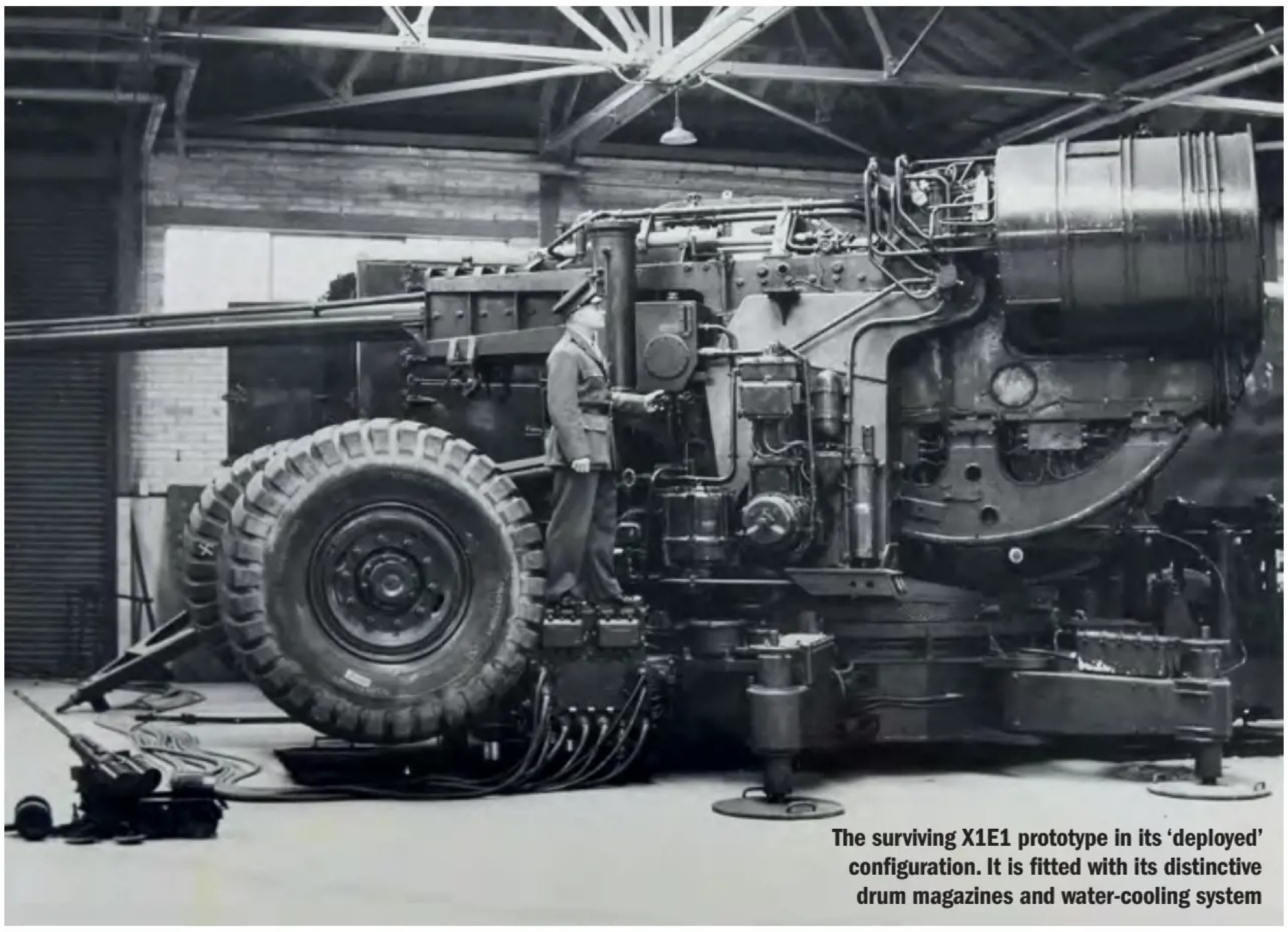
Of the guns proposed in 1950s, the Vickers 4.26/3.2in squeeze bore and the 5/2.32in FSDS gun were selected. By 1951, with the Vickers gun showing little promise, a new 4in gun with a skirted-band projectile was devised, being water-cooled and with extremely high velocity and rate of fire thanks to its hydraulic control system. The gun was named the VA4 by the Ordnance Board and later renamed the 102mm X1E1.

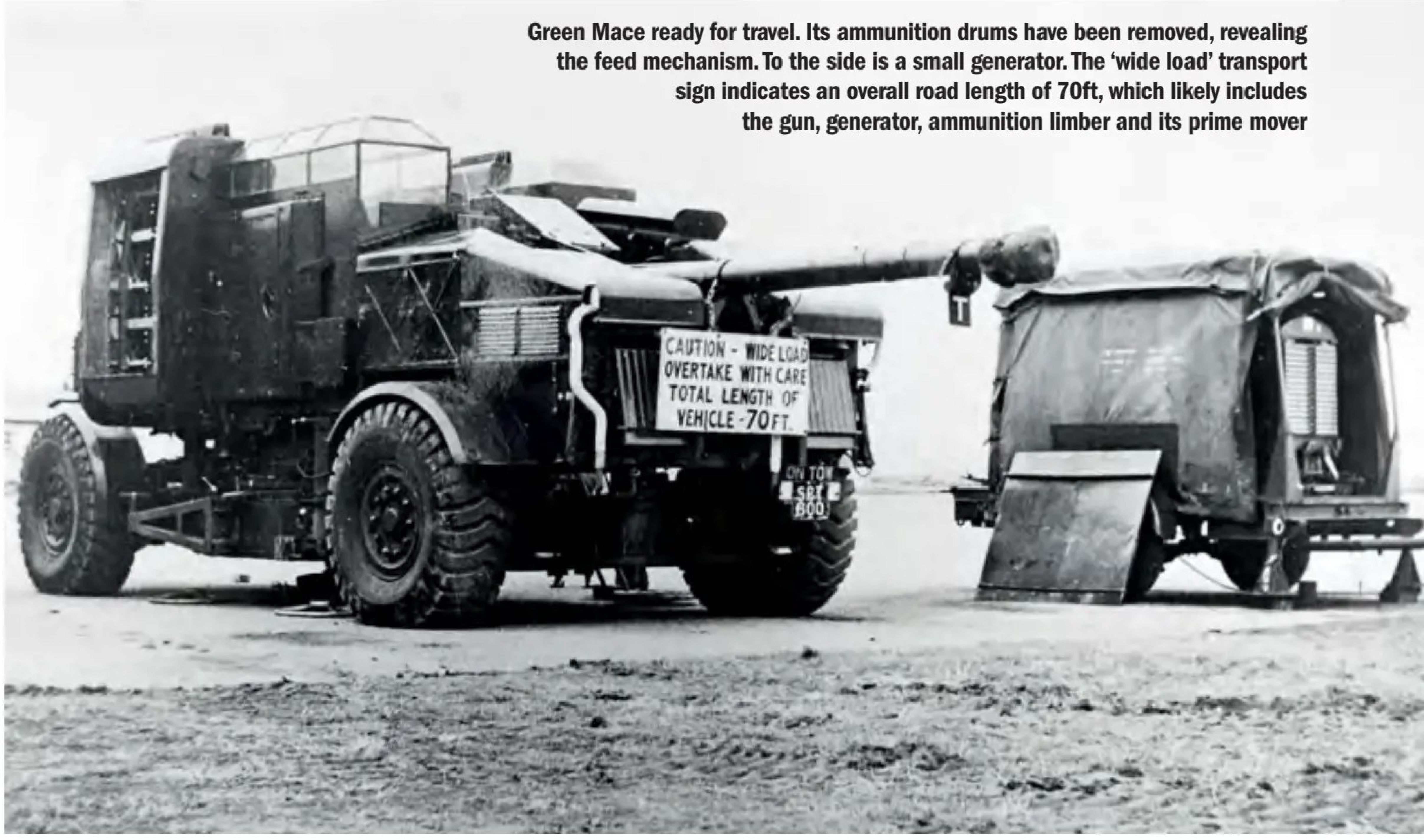
In 1952, the 5in FSDS gun and Vickers gun were provisionally accepted under the codenames Green Mace and Fixed Mace. The former was the mobile mounting system, the latter a fixed trials platform. In 1953, the X1E1 was accepted for further development and, in 1954, mounted to the Fixed Mace firing platform under the codename Fixed Maid and had its first live-firing trials the same year.

A year later, in 1955, the 5in FSDS barrel was fitted to the Fixed Mace but now under the name Green Maid. This is where the previous Red Maid is a useful juxtaposition as that too was a fixed platform but with a medium-calibre, drum-fed, 3in gun, so both Green Maid and Red Maid have some commonality in their approach.

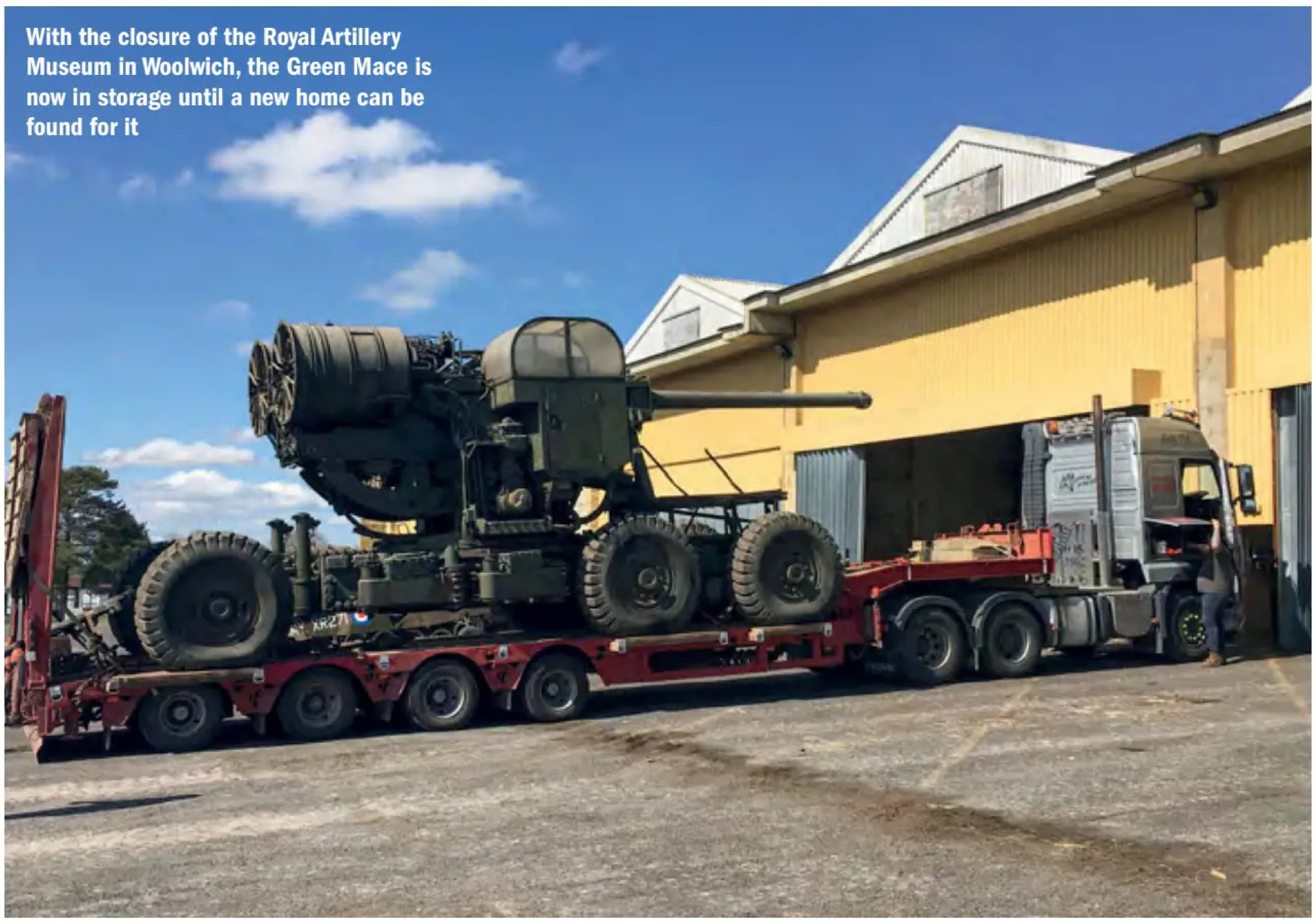
This also appears to be where confusion arises, as Green Mace is often listed as a 5in/127mm system when it remained a 4in/102mm weapon. Green Mace is therefore often termed as the QF 127/58 SBT X1, which is incorrect. Its design is also frequently attributed to RARDE, but this firm did not receive its royal prefix until the early 1960s.

Meanwhile, in 1945-1955, another project, the X4 Longhand, was in development. This involved fitting the 3.7in Mk.VI with a 12-round automatic feed that emerged from Ratefixer CN. A second project, the X4 Shorthand, was a manually loaded system that underwent live trials. This work


The surviving X1E1 prototype in its 'deployed' configuration. It is fitted with its distinctive drum magazines and water-cooling system



Green Mace ready for travel. Its ammunition drums have been removed, revealing the feed mechanism. To the side is a small generator. The 'wide load' transport sign indicates an overall road length of 70ft, which likely includes the gun, generator, ammunition limber and its prime mover


With the closure of the Royal Artillery Museum in Woolwich, the Green Mace is now in storage until a new home can be found for it

continued through 1956 in case the two experimental guns ran into problems.

After the Royal Artillery gave up its role in anti-aircraft weapons development and handed over most of its projects to the RAF in 1956, the X1E1 was mounted onto the Green Mace mobile platform. The weapon incorporated many of the preceding developments, being a water-cooled, rapid-fire, electrically fed twin 14-round drum-fed weapon system using Probert rifling and firing FSDS rounds. On paper, the gun was capable of emptying its magazines in just 17.5 seconds – 96 rounds per minute – about six times the fire rate of wartime HAA guns. It also featured 85° of elevation, essential for its role.

However, Green Mace's firing trials were less than stellar. Multiple stoppages occurred and the violent vibration caused parts to drop off. In practice, a fire rate of just 40rpm is recorded, but the effective ceiling was 39,000ft and muzzle velocity was clocked at 3,100ft/s meaning the shell would reach this altitude in 12½ seconds. More than 900 rounds were fired, but the gun failed almost 80 times – approximately 12 rounds per fault. Additionally, Green Mace was heavy, at 27.5 tonnes all in, and its two 80hp Rolls Royce B40 engines were barely able to move the gun under its own power (motors on heavy guns are used for powered traverse/elevation, but some offer limited self-propulsion to manoeuvre the weapon), so it had to be loaded onto a flatbed. The problems were deemed beyond the scope of a simple fix and, in 1957, the Green Mace X1E1 was shelved.

*"On paper, Green Mace was capable emptying its magazines in just 17.5 seconds – about six times the fire rate of wartime HAA guns"*

Green Mace was cancelled following the adoption of missile systems such as the RAF's Bloodhound. This Bloodhound battery is on show at the 1961 Society of British Aircraft Constructors' Annual Display. In the background stands Blue Streak, Britain's intermediate ballistic missile programme, which was cancelled in 1960, but later used as part of the Europa satellite launch vehicle

## Maid bows out

But what of Green Maid? The 5in gun is recorded as holding 13 rounds per drum to either side of the weapon. With an engagement range of up to 30,000ft, shell flight time was around 9.7 seconds. Despite the gun's larger calibre, a cyclic rate of fire was noted as 80rpm, and the gun was designed to fire a continuous burst of shells for 20 seconds with a 20-second interval. It appears from a later document that two round types were produced: a 15lb DA projectile and a 23lb VT device, with total shell weight approaching 65lb. Curiously, these were lighter than Green Mace's shells, which weighed 72lb.

Loading either gun was complex: pairs of loaders manning forklifts would approach the gun and align the stillages with the drums, then get out and manually feed the rounds into the magazines while the gun was in its reload position. Therefore, the guns would have a lot of downtime when in action, but this was less of a problem than might be imagined. While a single gun had the firepower of an wartime battery, they would not be deployed singularly. By staggering fire in four- or eight-gun batteries, as few as one or two guns would be reloading at any time. The single gunner sat in a small cockpit to one side, responding to tracking data from a separate radar system to aim and fire the weapon.

Ultimately, Green Maid was also cancelled and the back-up X4 Longhand was adopted (briefly) until, in 1958, the RAF disposed of its HAA guns and adopted a wholly guided missile system to fulfil the heavy surface-to-air defence role. The army retained its Thunderbird missiles until 1977, while the RAF's Bloodhound missile was kept until the 1990s.

Britain's anti-aircraft superguns never entered service. A collection of contradictions, they were innovative but overly ambitious, advanced but already obsolete and impressive albeit strategically lacking. Today, just one Green Mace prototype survives in storage, a reminder of a gun outpaced by the missile and aircraft technology it aimed to defeat. BW

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# FROM THE WEST END to the WESTERN FRONT

Trouper to trooper, actor to airman, **Robert Loraine** was fearless, famous and personified what many envisage a pioneering aviator to be. True enough, as Sean Feast discovers, the Shavian entertainer was a leading man in more ways than one

In some ways, Robert Bilcliffe Loraine – 'Bobbie' to his friends – was the Tom Cruise of his generation, a popular heartthrob actor of global renown with a passion for flying. But that's where the similarities start and end.

For while Cruise stars as an all-action hero, Loraine was the real thing, a veteran of the Second Boer War and World War One who received two decorations for gallantry, was mentioned in despatches at least thrice and rose to the rank of lieutenant-colonel before a nasty leg-wound finally put paid to his military career.

Born on January 14, 1876, acting was in Robert's blood. Both parents were connected with the profession, his father a notable Shakespearean actor. However, neither encouraged him to follow in their footsteps, so instead he ran away from his home in Liscard (near Wallasey, Merseyside) at 15 and joined a local theatre company in Liverpool. His first appearance was at the Adelphi Theatre, which he described disparagingly as "a sailor's dive". It was hard work, putting on up to six different plays a week, two performances nightly, catering for 'popular' audiences from whom thruppence could secure a private box!

From Liverpool, Robert joined the Ben Greet Woodland Players (named after founder Sir Philip Barling Greet) appearing in a large Shakespearean repertoire across Britain, with all performances in the open air. Recognising that to be counted as a serious actor he needed to conquer London and the West End, he was engaged first by the renowned actor and producer Sir George Alexander (notable for introducing Oscar Wilde's plays to the wider public) before heading to Drury Lane and appearing as a young highland

ABOVE: **Actor and aviation pioneer Robert Loraine** HULTON/GETTY

BELOW: **FE.8 fighters of 40 Squadron, a unit Loraine commanded during World War One** W S R BLOOMFIELD

**Imperial Yeoman cross a plain in pursuit of Boers** WILLIAM CUMMING/OFFICIAL PHOTOGRAPH

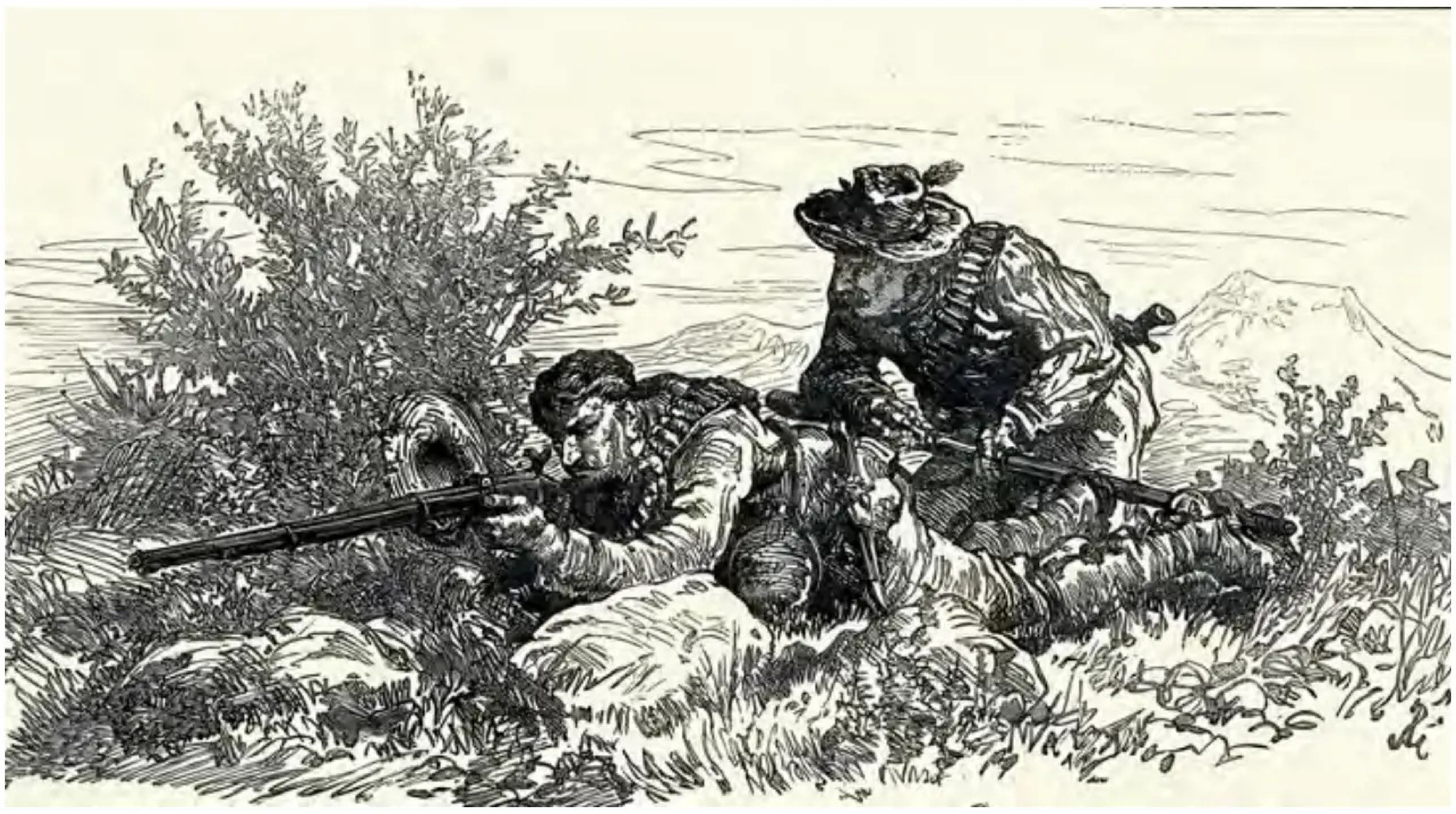
**Loraine was mentioned in despatches for his running of the siege lines surrounding Mafeking, passing the Boers under fire to maintain communications with the garrison** JAN VAN HOEPEN

officer in the Princess Theatre production of *One of the Best*.

In 1899, with life imitating art, Robert joined the 49th (Montgomeryshire) Company of the 9th (Welsh) Battalion of the Imperial Yeomanry as a trooper and was despatched to South Africa to fight as mounted infantry in the Second Boer War, returning with the Queen's South Africa Medal with Wittebergen, Transvaal and Cape Colony clasps. As he modestly explained to a journalist in *The Playgoer and Society Illustrated* a decade later: "I saw a good deal of fighting under Hunter [Lieutenant-General Sir Archibald] and Baden-Powell."

## A ride against death

The 'good deal of fighting' Loraine referred to led to him being mentioned in despatches twice. It was a time "packed with hardship, action and enterprise… in ceaseless fighting and sniping in mountain fastness… and a daily span of 20 hours in the saddle".



**Among the Boers were tough, grizzled frontiersmen and farmers, who were often proficient marksmen – with or without their modern Mauser rifles. Loraine gambled with his life to stalk three of the crack-shots** GETTY

**Renowned Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw was arguably Loraine's closest friend** US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

> *"Loraine rode all night to convey a message between Colonels Robert Baden-Powell and Herbert Plumer, arriving to find two bullet holes through his helmet and three bullet grazes and a trapped round in the coat strapped on the saddle"*

On one occasion, a 'mention' came from spotting the position of an enemy gun battery: "Owing to his gift of accurate hearing," the despatch ran, "Trooper Loraine, who had been out on Cossack post and patrol, could tell whence the following was proceeding. He passed the information back to our guns so precisely that the Boer pieces were rapidly silenced." On another, he rode all night to convey a message between Colonels Robert Baden-Powell and Herbert Plumer – both won fame for their roles in the defence (and relief) of Mafeking – arriving to find two bullet holes through his helmet and three bullet grazes and a trapped round in the coat strapped on the saddle behind him. He was congratulated – and he congratulated himself as it had been "a ride against death" and he had come through.

Robert was frequently in action, at first attached to a machine gun section for which he showed particular aptitude, then later with the rifle companies. On one reconnaissance expedition, he stalked and captured three Boer snipers, taking their surrender once their ammunition was exhausted. On another, when his mounted column came under attack, he witnessed women and children being forced from the houses from whence the firing started, and then the houses being punitively burned while the women watched.

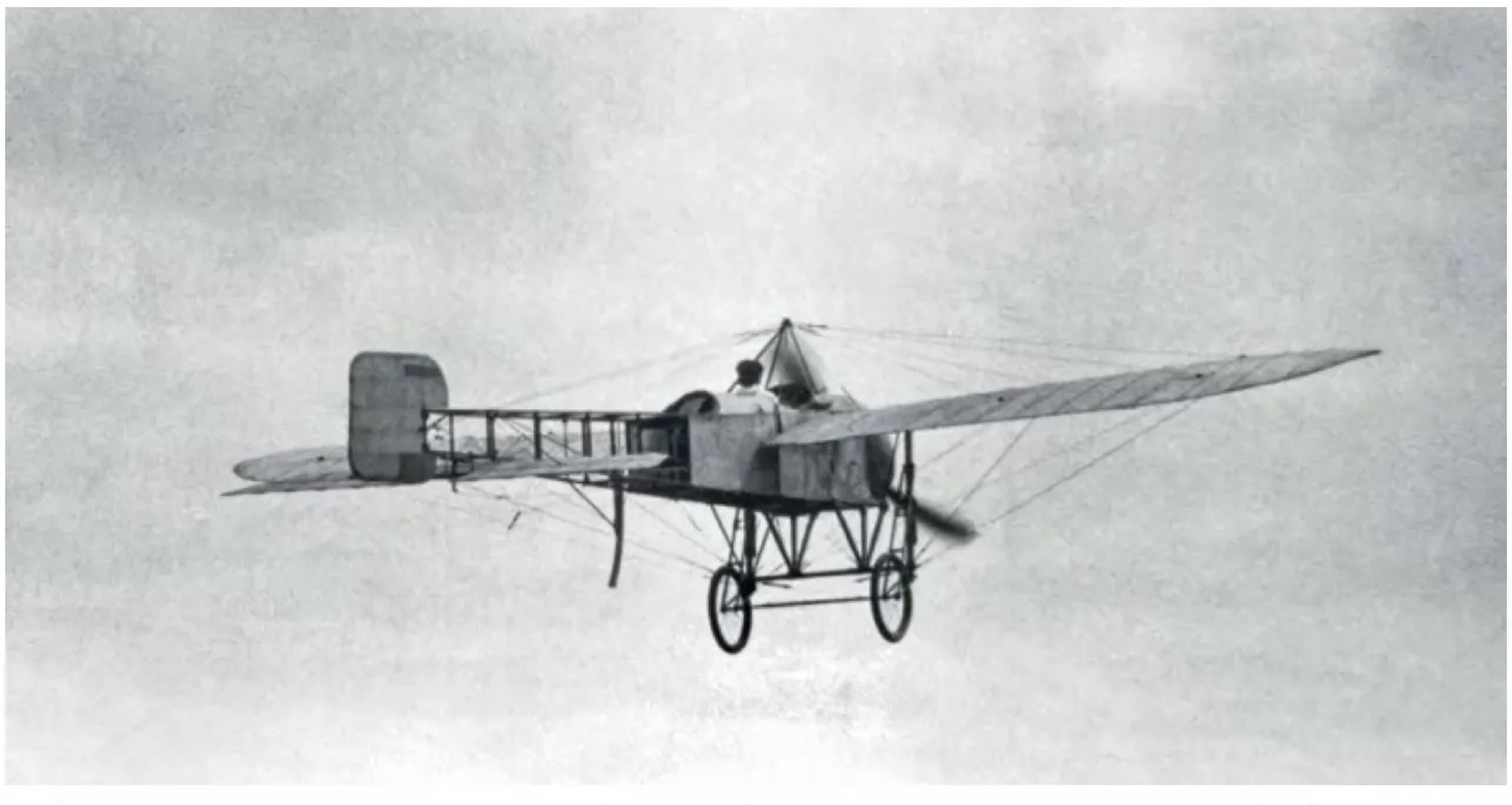
His memory of the South African campaign and his service in the Yeomanry was coloured by his relationship with his sergeant-major whom "he could not abide". The feeling was mutual and not helped when one evening Robert was roused for sentry duty from a deep sleep. Thinking he was being attacked, he sprang up and began swinging, causing such a commotion that the horses became nervous and broke free of their ropes. "It took three hours to achieve some kind of order," he remembered later, "and at roll-call next morning one-fifth of the horses were struck off charge!"

## Engine trouble

On return to civilian life, Loraine continued acting in London before securing his first role on stage in America, performing at the Knickerbocker Theater, New York, as Ralph Percy in *To have and to hold*.

Although a failure, his appearance helped establish connections in the country that enabled him not only to act but also produce plays for several playwrights. These included George Bernard Shaw who became a lifelong friend, and the person to whom Robert would later send his medals and logbook for safekeeping. He was also identified as 'the name of the person to be informed of casualties' on Robert's military record. Robert's first managerial venture was Shaw's *Man and Superman,* which proved a huge hit on both sides of 'The Pond' for its "strong dramatic situations" and "sparkling dialogue".

Described as a lover of the outdoors, Robert Loraine was also fascinated by technology, and especially keen on powered flight – a passion he shared with Bernard Shaw. Inspired by the exploits of Henri Farman, the pioneer aircraft designer and manufacturer, and having witnessed Blériot's crossing of the English Channel, Loraine purchased his own Blériot machine and went to The Blériot School of Flying at Pau, France, in April 1910 – it was during this time that he used the term 'joystick' in his diary to describe an aircraft's control column, a word still used today.



**A Blériot XI monoplane, the type used by Loraine in his record-setting quest to master the skies** VIA ANDREW THOMAS

A pioneer in his element: Loraine in his Bristol Boxkite biplane during his first public appearance as an exhibition pilot at the Bournemouth Aviation Week in July 1910 W BUTCHER & SONS/ALAMY

Loraine poses ahead of an aircraft at the Blériot Flying School CCI ARCHIVE

> *"Considered to be a ham-fisted, even careless pilot... Robert seemed to confirm the fact by crashing two precious aircraft in quick succession, such that his peers determined that any subsequent service was to be in the observer's seat"*

After crashing a machine at Pau he went on to Farman's establishment at Mourmelon and was awarded his flying certificate on June 21. It was at Mourmelon that he teamed up with Jules Védrines who became his de facto chief engineer and mechanic, and who was continually employed in straightening many a bent aircraft left in Robert's care!

In R Dallas Brett's *History of British Aviation*, Robert is cited among the "well-known English pilots" at the time in the company of Claude Grahame-White, Bertram Dickson, Alfred Rawlinson and the Honourable Charles Rolls (of Rolls-Royce fame). However, pre-war flying was a dangerous occupation, accidents frequent, and deaths not uncommon. Rolls was killed on the second day of competition at the Bournemouth Aviation Week in July 1910 and Rawlinson seriously hurt two days later. Robert almost came to grief having been obliged to force-land his Farman on the Isle of Wight "after a plucky flight in very tricky weather".

At a further meeting at the Blackpool Flying Carnival, Robert "...proceeded to throw discretion to the wind and treat the crowds to some hair-raising aviation of a strictly practical nature". After a flight of almost four hours, which for some reason did not win him an endurance prize, Robert put aside any disappointment he may have felt by achieving a bigger 'first' shortly after and crossing the Irish Sea. Despite the wires snapping and his engine failing on no fewer than five occasions, he made it across – though he had to swim the last 70 yards when his engine failed for a final time! Dallas Brett reported: "No pioneer ever attempted a more dangerous task, and none ever had so many successive escapes from death in so short a time."

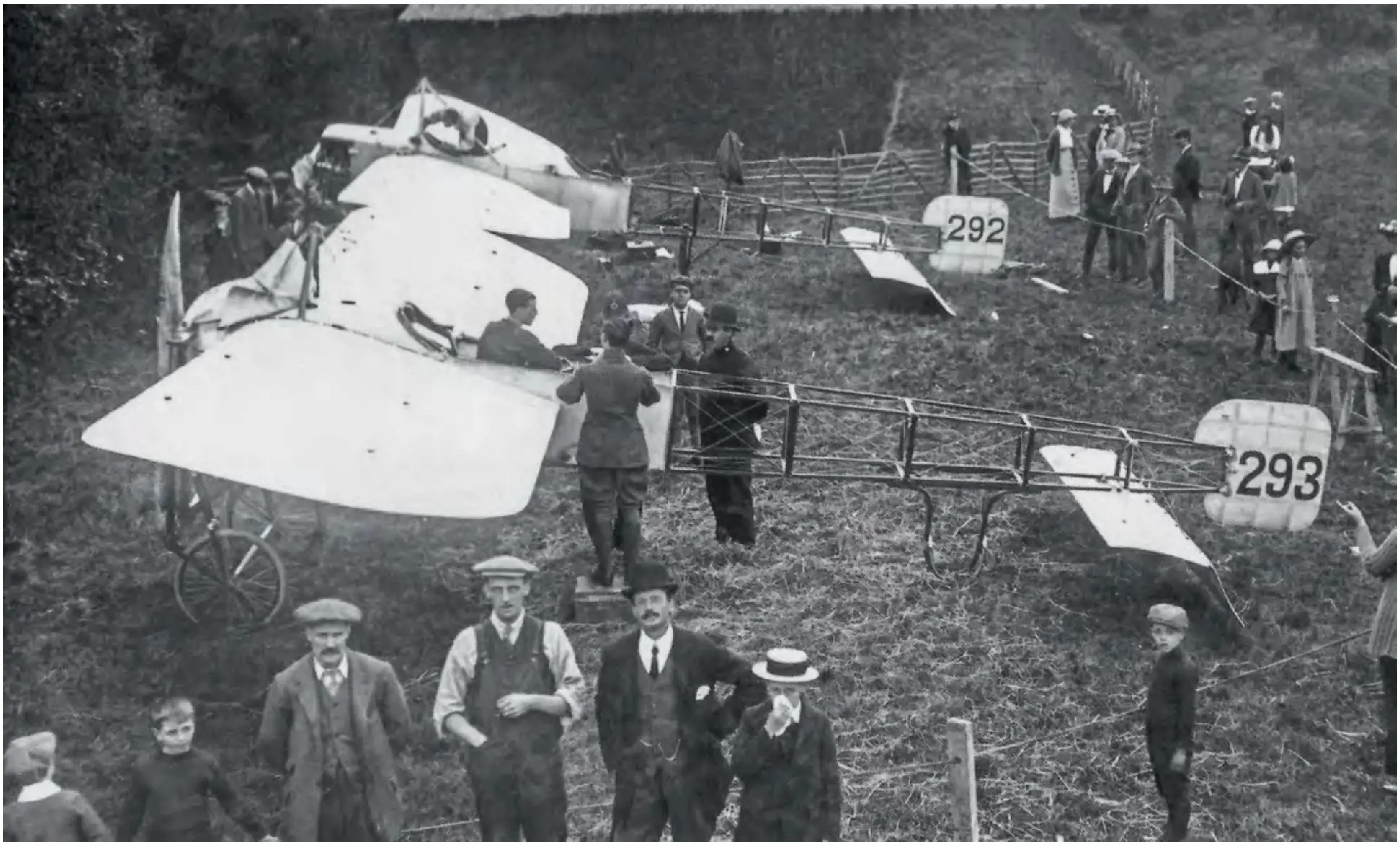
Robert added other 'firsts', including the first use of wireless from the air to the ground and he was one of the first three pilots to hold the Silver Medal awarded by the Royal Aero Club for outstanding achievement in aviation.

In October 1910, Loraine became engaged to an Australian actress, Marie Lohr, with whom he had starred in *Smith*, a play written with the pair of them in mind by William Somerset Maugham and in which she played the title role. It premiered at the Comedy Theatre in London on September 30, 1909. The engagement was broken off by Lohr after she allegedly gave Robert an ultimatum. A press report at the time (1912) said that she sought to make it a condition of their betrothal that he abandon the pursuit of fame in the air. Robert, of course, refused "having his wings clipped by Cupid" and the pair "mutually agreed to part". An earlier marriage to another actress, Julie Opp, lasted three years.

## Eyes in the sky

Greater battles were to come. With the outbreak of war in August 1914, Robert was accepted for service by the Royal Flying Corps (having first applied to the Royal Naval Air Service) as a temporary second lieutenant in the Special Reserve. Considered by some to be a ham-fisted, perhaps even careless pilot, Robert was said to hold the joystick with his fist "as a barmaid draws a pint". He also cared little for the engine, and how it was treated once in the air. Robert seemed to confirm the fact by crashing two precious aircraft in quick succession, such that his peers determined that any subsequent service was to be in the observer's seat. The difficult task of informing him was given to Sir Sefton Brancker, a contemporary of Robert's from the Second Boer War, and later a senior air force commander.

The RFC that arrived in France on August 13, 1914, comprised 63 aircraft of various types, 105 officers and 755 other ranks. It also included 95 motor vehicles and all the other equipment considered essential to support, maintain and repair the force in the field. In September, Robert was posted to 3 Squadron, which was equipped with Farman and Blériot IX aircraft (considered the best they had at the time) and commanded by Major John 'Jack' Salmond



**Two Blériot XI monoplanes of 3 Squadron, RFC, 1914** VIA ANDREW THOMAS

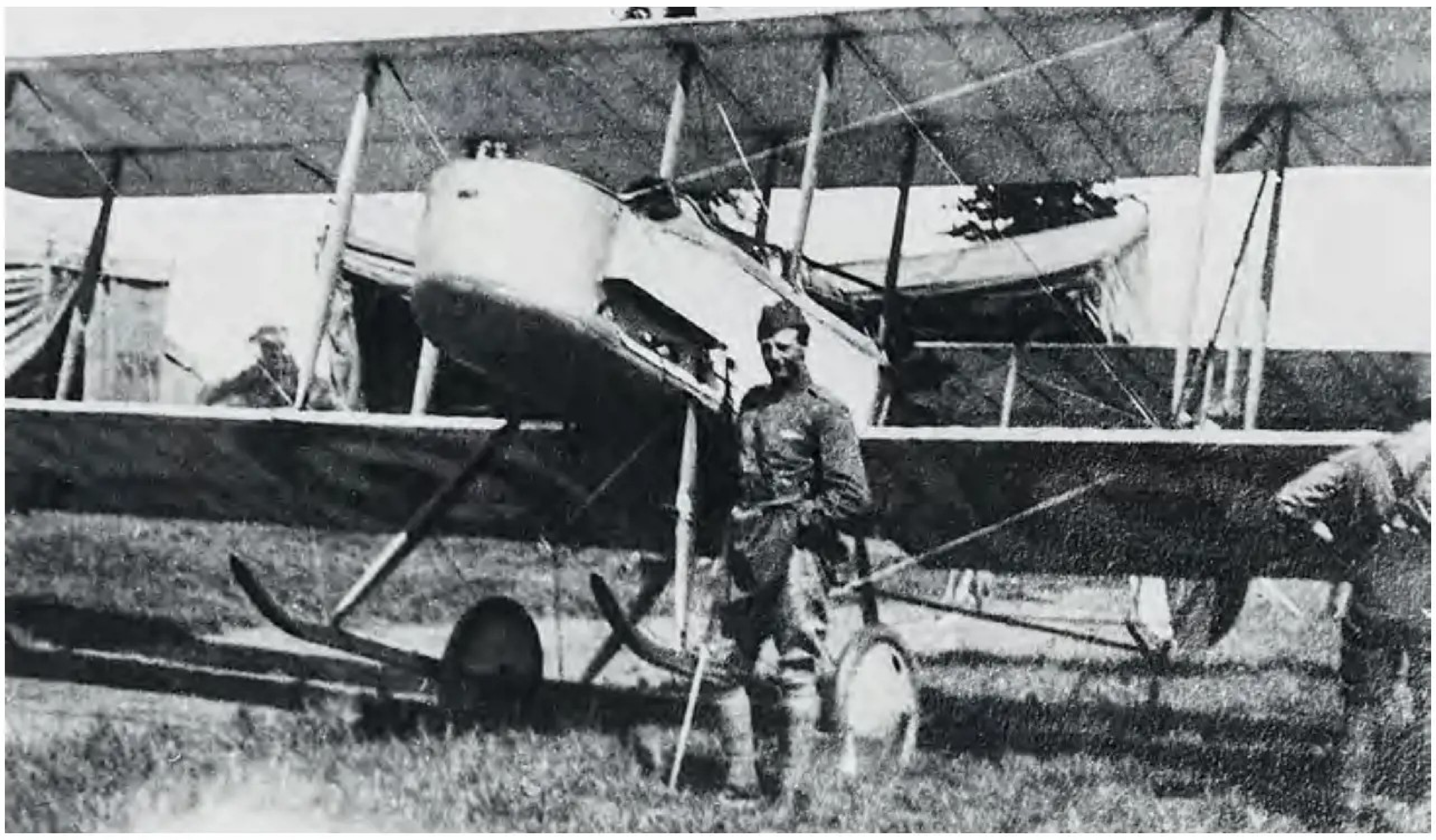
(later Marshal of the RAF). It was tasked in the broadest terms with army co-operation.

In practice, this meant Robert was soon in action flying reconnaissance sorties in support of the British Expeditionary Force during the Battle of Mons, the first major engagement between British and German forces on the Western Front. Reconnaissance was a dangerous pastime. He returned from his first trip (with Captain R Lewis, future 5 Squadron CO, at the controls) and counted 14 bullet holes in the fabric of his aircraft, but noted in his diary "could scarcely recover from my excitement". On his second trip (with Lieutenant George Pretyman) they chased off a Aviatik reconnaissance aircraft, but failed to locate the gun battery they were seeking. Robert thought the operations "a great lark", especially the thought of trying to bring down a German machine with a steel dart lobbed from the cockpit!

## Touch and go

Patrols steadily increased in duration, Robert recording trips exceeding three hours as routine. On October 18, he noted his "best reconnaissance" in his diary, "Generals Headlam, Ferguson and Smith-Dorrien all very pleased".

It was while artillery spotting on November 22, 1914, that Robert and his pilot, Denys Corbett-Wilson (another pre-war aviation pioneer), found themselves in bother. Robert later recounted in *The Telegraph*: "I was wounded in the middle of an important reconnaissance mission, by an anti-aircraft shrapnel shell, when I was flying at a height of 5,000ft above the enemy's lines. My right lung was pierced from the base of my back, the ball coming out near my neck in front. As I had done daily three to six hours' work in the air over the enemy for nearly three months, I think I may consider myself pretty lucky.



**Loraine stands next to one of 5 Squadron's Vickers FB.5 fighters** VIA ANDREW THOMAS

**Loraine as a captain in 5 Squadron** VIA ANDREW THOMAS

**Loraine and his observer, Lubbock, duelled with an Albatros C (possibly a C.III), Germany's most common C-class (two-seat) aircraft during the war** UNIVERSITÉ DE CAEN NORMANDIE

"Although I was not expected to recover, I am now, as you see, doing extremely well, getting on, indeed, quite rapidly, and the doctors assure me my recovery will in the end be absolutely complete."

A Royal Army Medical Corps major on the staff of the hospital where Robert was treated also gave insight into the severity of the wound: "I have an interesting personage in my hospital – Loraine, aviator and actor. I have often seen him in London in *Man and Superman*. He was out making a sketch of the enemy's position and, while doing so, a bullet from a shell hit him below the shoulder-blade, traversed the lung and came out just below the collarbone in front. He was very bad when brought to my hospital but is doing well now. He is convinced our treatment of him when he was brought in saved his life and is correspondingly grateful. I think he will be all right now."

It had been touch and go; on two occasions, Robert had been given the last rites, and his squadron CO was not allowed to see him because he was considered too ill. Somehow, Robert pulled through. The wound was 'a Blighty one', such that he was invalided home and did not return to the Western Front until the following spring, having spent time in South America to recover.

## Making headlines

Recalled for training as a pilot and flying the BE.2c two-seat biplane, Loraine was promoted captain and posted to command 'B' Flight of 5 Squadron, the unit with which he firmly established his wartime reputation as an aggressive fighter.

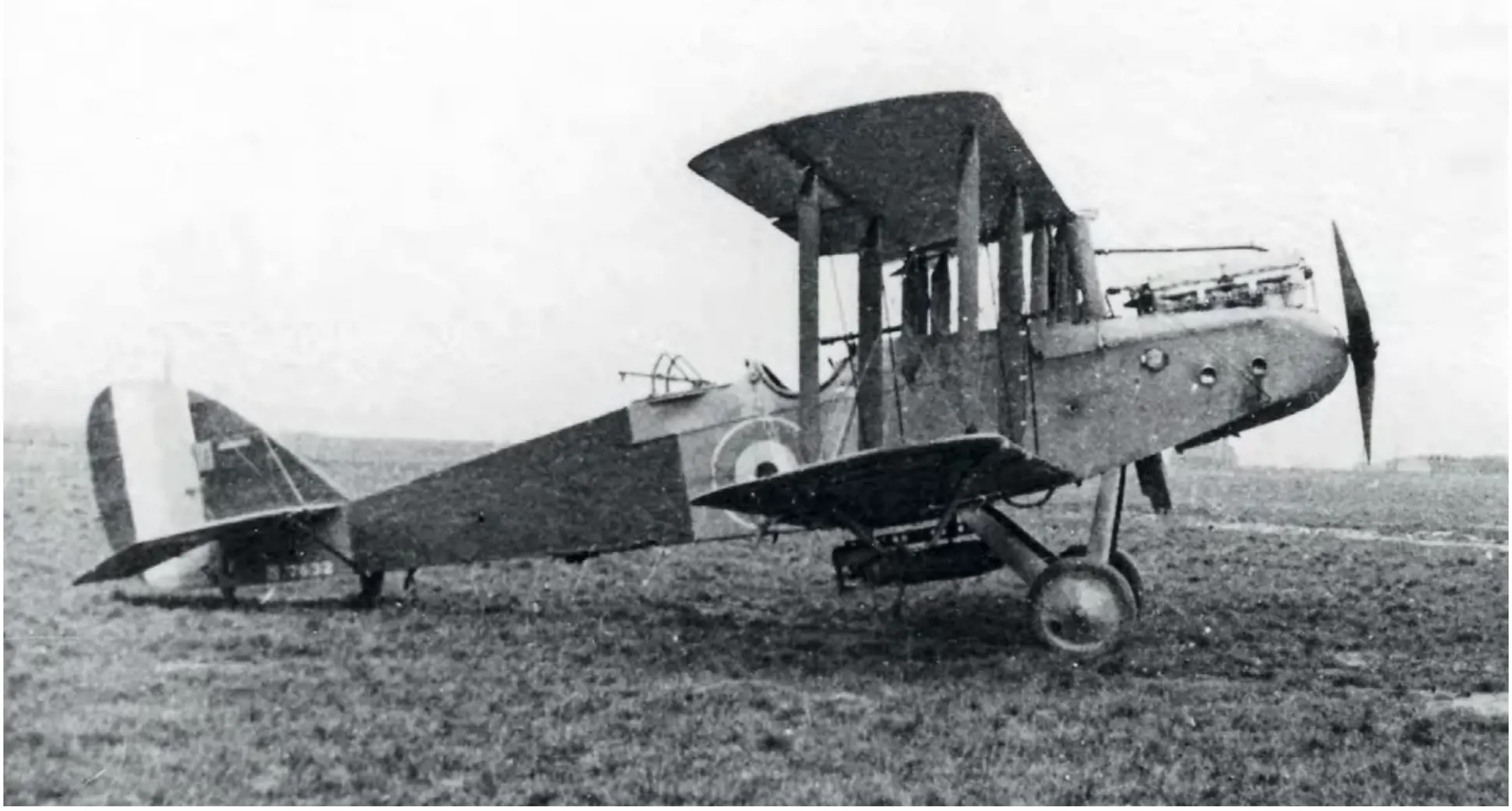
> ***"The German dived almost vertically, followed by the Vickers, whose pilot fired the remaining half-drum while the observer emptied nearly another drum at him. The Albatros was seen to crash to earth"***
>
> RFC COMMUNIQUÉ (NO.16)

Under Major Andrew Board, 5 Squadron comprised three Flights: 'A' and 'C' Flights were dedicated to reconnaissance and artillery observation respectively; 'B' Flight aimed to seek and destroy enemy aircraft and was equipped with the Vickers FB.5 'Gunbus' – a two-seat 'pusher' aircraft purpose-built for air-to-air combat. With the 'Gunbus', Robert formed a winning partnership with his observer, Lieutenant the Honourable Eric Lubbock. On October 26, 1915, they were in a duel with an enemy Albatros sufficiently noteworthy to make it into the regular *RFC Communiqué* (No.16).

It read: "Captain Loraine and Lieutenant Lubbock in a Vickers fighter on patrol near Houthem observed two German machines approaching from the east. The first was attacked and a half-drum fired at him at a range of 15 yards. The German dived almost vertically, followed by the Vickers, whose pilot fired the remaining half-drum while the observer emptied nearly another drum at him. The German machine, an Albatros, was seen to crash to earth and turn over. Captain Loraine then found himself at 700ft and climbed to attack the second German. At 6,000ft, the engine of the Vickers stopped, and Captain Loraine was forced to land. The pilot of the German machine was shot by machine gun fire, and the observer was wounded and made prisoner."

A note in the miscellaneous section of the *RFC Communiqué* added: "The machine brought down by Captain Loraine was an Albatros. The pilot, a corporal (Unteroffizier Gereld), was killed by rifle fire. The observer, Leutnant Buchholz, was wounded in the head and is in hospital. He was only 17 years old and had earned the Iron Cross when serving as an infantry officer in IX Corps. They belonged to the 33rd Flying Squadron attached to the XXVII Reserve Corps. Attempts to salve the machine, which fell very near the trench line, were unsuccessful and during the attempt the Canadians lost two killed and two wounded."

In Lubbock's account of what he called the "exciting" action, pilot and observer fired until Lubbock's gun jammed, by which time, the German was done for. Several 'trophies' were recovered from the wreckage, including the rudder control and binoculars, the latter mounted and presented to the successful pilot. Both Robert and Eric were awarded the Military Cross for bringing the enemy down. Robert's citation, which appeared in the *London Gazette* in November 1915, stated: "The enemy pilot was hit, and his camera and wireless transmitter were subsequently found to have bullet holes in them."



After a period commanding a training wing, Loraine returned to operational flying with 211 Squadron. The unit flew the DH.9 bomber, with this 211 Squadron example armed with a 230lb bomb VIA ANDREW THOMAS

News of his award was widely reported in the popular press at home and in the United States, where Robert was almost always referred to as the 'actor-airman'. He later flew back over German lines to drop a note of condolence to his adversaries and to inform them Buchholz was a POW.

Sporting the white and purple ribbon on his tunic, Robert continued flying with 5 Squadron until the following March, entering combat with another enemy aircraft on at least one further occasion but without result. He was then posted to 40 Squadron at Gosport to take command as the unit was being brought up to strength. Now with the temporary rank of Major, Robert immediately set about creating the finest fighting unit he could, with the best-kept and maintained machines.

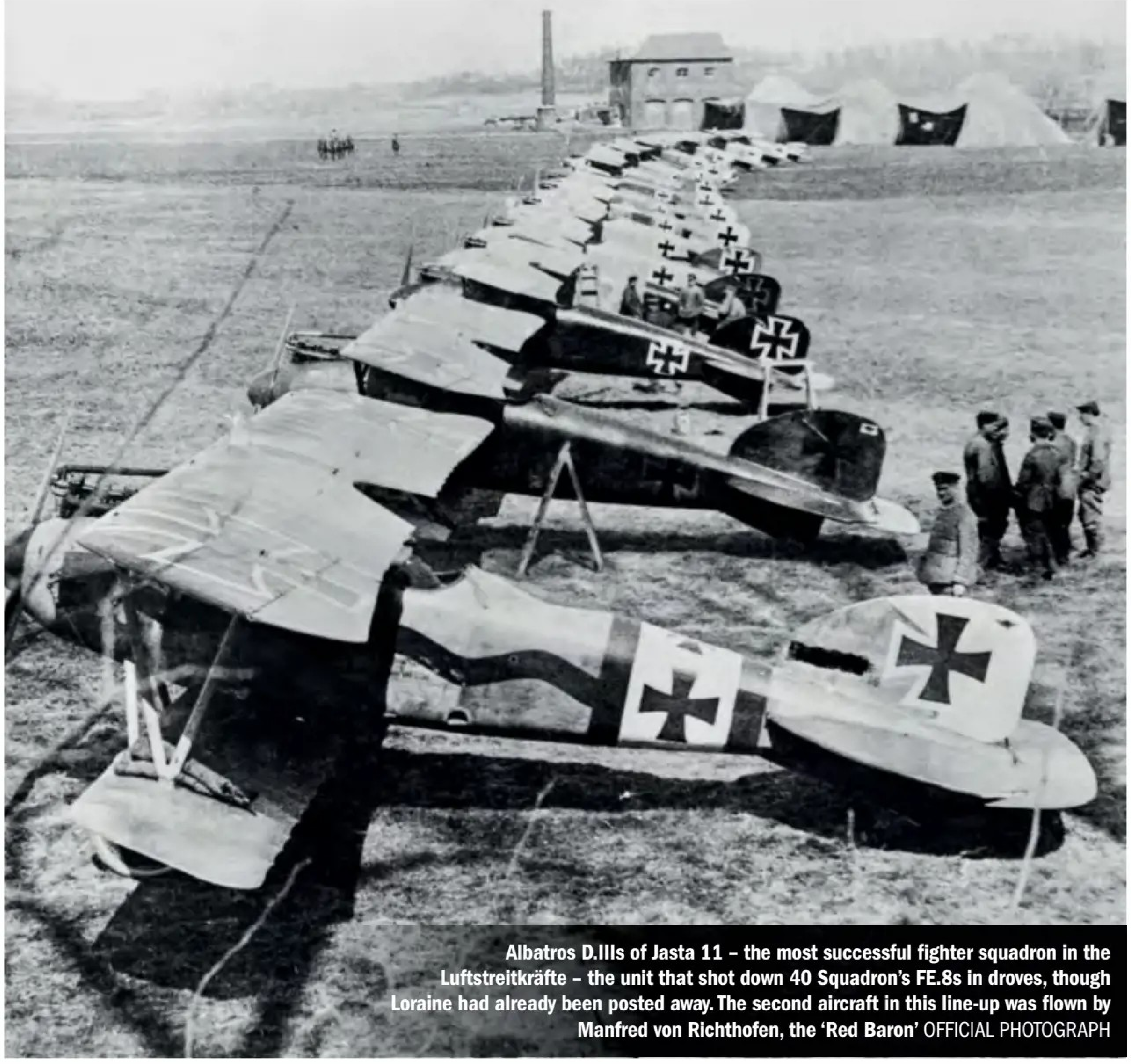
## Hero, lunatic, dirty tricks

Arriving in France in August 1916, with the Somme offensive in full swing, 40 Squadron was immediately pressed into service providing offensive patrols, but soon found that its FE.8, another early 'pusher', was quickly outclassed by the latest Albatros. In one day in March 1917, a complete patrol of nine FE.8s was intercepted and shot down by a formation of fighters from Jasta 11, led by the remarkable Manfred Von Richthofen. But by then, Robert had been posted to Home Establishment in preparation to command a 14 Wing and promoted to temporary lieutenant-colonel. He had also been awarded the Distinguished Service Order for 'distinguished service in the field,' despite spending his entire time at 40 Squadron flying a desk.

It was in autumn 1917, while in command of a training wing at Andover, that Robert's reputation suffered a setback. To some, Loraine was a brave, if somewhat strict commander who could be forgiven because he was always prepared to lead from the front, and this earned him respect. To others, he was a thoughtless and even reckless individual who cared little for his men. His mechanic described him both as "a lunatic" and "a hero", while a fellow pilot said he was "a holy terror as a CO, but good company off duty". The famous editor of *Aeroplane*, C G Grey, wrote following Robert's appointment: "For the next eight months he became the most unpopular man in the RFC in England."

Robert's temperament became associated with a perceived high casualty rate among the trainees under his command, which led to a court martial for being drunk on duty – a charge described by a fellow officer as "a dirty trick". Robert was certainly hard on his men; if anyone complained about their aircraft, he flew it for himself to prove there was nothing wrong and then sent them up. Unfortunately, many subsequently crashed, to the extent that some believed Robert had deliberately sabotaged their aircraft to prove a point.

While cleared of wrongdoing, Robert was sufficiently affronted that he requested



Albatros D.IIIs of Jasta 11 – the most successful fighter squadron in the Luftstreitkräfte – the unit that shot down 40 Squadron's FE.8s in droves, though Loraine had already been posted away. The second aircraft in this line-up was flown by Manfred von Richthofen, the 'Red Baron' OFFICIAL PHOTOGRAPH

**In 1929, Loraine played Long John Silver in Treasure Island at the Strand Theatre, which was filmed – with sound!** TOPFOTO

**Loraine's wife, Winnifred, and his three daughters** TOPFOTO

a return to flying duties. He returned to France in May 1918 as CO of 211 Squadron, equipped with Airco DH.9 bombers, and was soon in the thick of it, happy to fly night raids as pilot or observer. However, his zest for life was in something of a negative spiral and he became inwardly morose and sullen. Too many friends and contemporaries had been killed and the battles now being fought were a world away from the primitive days of 1914/15.

Throughout the spring and early summer, the squadron directed many of its bombing raids against the U-boats, attacking docks and harbour installations at Bruges, Zeebrugge and Ostend. On July 20, 1918, while returning with Captain H Ireland from a raid on Bruges, Loraine's aircraft was attacked by a seaplane. A contemporary report noted: "Both pilot and his observer – the redoubtable squadron CO – engaged the enemy whose first burst punctured the water pump and wounded Loraine in the leg. Loraine continued to engage the enemy which was driven down out of control. With the engine losing water, Ireland headed for Newport where the engine seized but he was able to effect a forced landing, gliding onto the beach opposite La Panne."

The injury was severe, so much so that the surgeons in France considered amputation. Three twisted bullets were removed from Loraine's shattered kneecap, and he was far from recovered by the time the guns finally fell silent. He relinquished his commission on account of 'ill health caused by wounds' and was granted the honorary rank of major. He left the RAF – as the RFC had become – in December 1918.

## Waning star

During the war, Robert did not entirely abandon acting. While with 40 Squadron, he formed and ran a drama society and put on the premier performance of a controversial play by his good friend, George Bernard Shaw, *O'Flaherty VC*. The plot centres around an Irish soldier in the British Army returning home having earned the Victoria Cross. It was intended to support a recruitment drive, Shaw arguing that most soldiers enlist for adventure, and there were few more adventurous than the Irish.

Robert Loraine was a complicated character who polarised opinions. In his days as a trooper he was described as "quick with his fists and easily offended". Comrades "either resented him as a show off or thought he was the finest fellow going". It was much the same come the war. The NCOs on his squadron were impressed by his concern for their welfare, one remarking: "He was one of the only field officers who ever entered the cookhouse at Gosport to inspect and sample the men's food. No body of men were better fed or looked after than the men of 40 Squadron."

Major Frederick Powell MC, an 'ace' who flew with Robert in 5 Squadron as a senior lieutenant (despite being only 19) and who followed Robert to 40 Squadron, maintained it was difficult to separate Robert Loraine the officer, from Robert Loraine the actor: "You felt the officer was a conception of what he thought the part should be. Loraine the man, was full of understanding; but outwardly he remained a disciplinarian to the last inch of him."

Post-war, Loraine returned to the stage though his star was waning, and he was no longer the heartthrob he had once been. He had plans to make a "film epic of the skies" – and in colour – though it never came to fruition. In 1921, he married Winnifred Strangman, asking Duncan Pitcher, a fellow RFC officer, to be his best man. Robert and Winnifred had three daughters. He died suddenly on December 23, 1935, and Winnifred later wrote a biography of her husband, published in 1938. Despite this, and being a remarkable aviation pioneer, 'Bobbie' Loraine's name has largely disappeared into obscurity. BW

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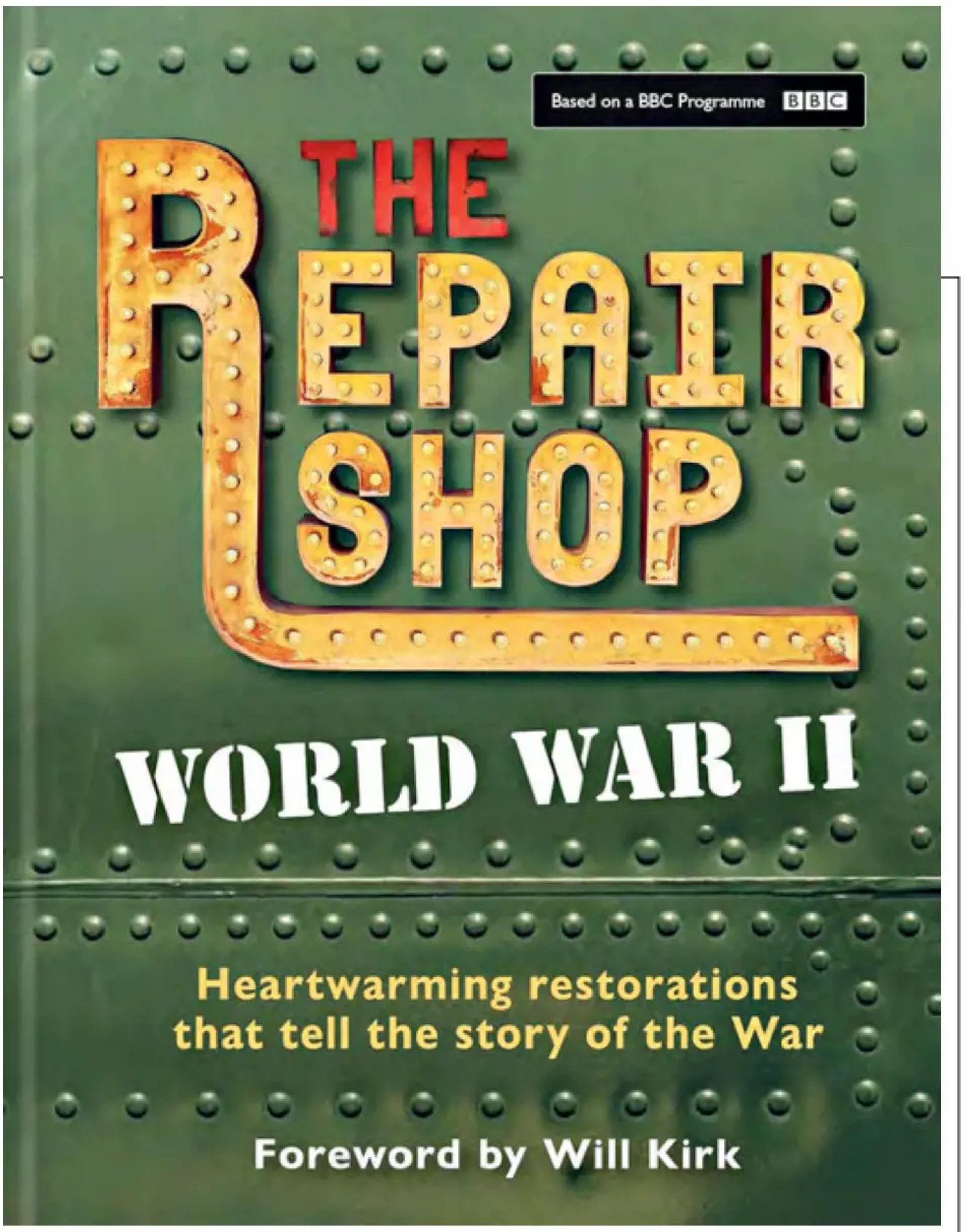
# The Repair Shop:

## World War Two

*By Jane Dowle*


Based on a BBC Programme BBC
THE REPAIR SHOP
WORLD WAR II
Heartwarming restorations that tell the story of the War
Foreword by Will Kirk

What do a cook's bag, a lost doll, a cat-shaped teapot, a teddy bear and a violin have in common? They – together with many other items – have revealed a touching story of conflict in this latest title by Kyle Books.

Naturally, the wartime period is one dominated by stories of hardship and adversity, the brutalisation of entire peoples and the harrowing sights experienced by those caught up on both sides of the fighting. Some of that surfaces here – it would be wrong otherwise – but overall, this heartwarming book based on hit BBC television series and sofa favourite *The Repair Shop* should be an entertaining fix in the long winter nights ahead.

Following a foreword by the ever-passionate show frontman, Will Kirk, 30 items with a tangible connection to wartime Britain are handed to the show's expert restorers for a belt-and-braces renewal to bring them back to life – and revealing the stories hidden within. Chapters divide the objects into six themes: The Home Front, Children and the War, Secrets and Spies, War in the Skies and Seas, The War Abroad and, finally, Homecoming and Remembrance. Each chapter also features detailed profiles of members of *The Repair Shop* team.

Let's start with the cook's bag. Lovingly tended to by the show's leatherworker, Suzie Fletcher, this belonged to Pauline Davidson, who joined the Auxiliary Territorial Service in 1939 and ended up serving as Prime Minister Winston Churchill's private cook. The confusion of Churchill's Chartwell estate in Kent, with Chequers, the Prime Minister's official country house in Buckinghamshire, is a small gaffe, but one that does not detract from the story as it is revealed that Davidson's leather attaché bag is both in urgent need of some *Repair Shop* TLC, but also contains treasures within. Inside are wartime recipes, guest lists for events, a signed photograph of Winston Churchill and even an engraved cigarette case gifted by the Supreme Allied Commander for the European theatre, US General Dwight D Eisenhower.

There's also a Victorian clock that 'witnessed' the capture of one of the first German spies to land in Britain at the start of the war, the navigator's cap of Sierra Leonian barrister, RAF airman and prisoner of war Johnny Smythe QC, MBE, a radio set that survived the Dunkirk evacuation and the extremely delicate bust of a British POW hand-carved in soap from within the notorious Changi prison in Singapore.

How about the remarkable story behind a gifted copy of a children's book – the 1931-published *Stories From Everywhere* by Rhoda Power – with a suspicious puncture mark? The beloved hardback filled with folktales and fables was given to Tony, father of Jennie Jewitt-Harris, on his eighth birthday in 1943. However, in 1944, a Luftwaffe bomb intended for the King George V and William Girling reservoirs near Chingford in Essex, fell wide and took off the roof and front of Tony's family home. Fearing the worst, rescuers scoured the remains of the property for its occupants, finding the boy still in bed, his book placed across his chest – with a large shard of broken glass lodged in the back cover of the lifesaving tome.

One of the more unusual items featured in the book – and certainly one that, at first glance, would appear to have little to do with the war – is the cat teapot. Yet this kitty curio also has an incredible survival story behind it. Inherited by Matthew Brooksbank from his Aunty Gladys, the comical ceramic – named Dinky – was a gift presented to Gladys from two sisters involved in some clandestine activity or another inside Nazi-occupied Europe.

Gladys, who earlier in the war had been approached while working at Woolworths by a gentleman recruiting for the Special Operations Executive, had helped one of the sisters escape danger. However, the teapot was shattered when Gladys moved through Germany by train, after soldiers boarded the carriages and searched passenger luggage with very rough handling. *Repair Shop* ceramics restorer Kirsten Ramsay had to remove decades-old 'toffee-like' adhesive from the teapot (used by Gladys in a botched repair), before carefully tending to the cracks, re-bonding, smoothing and repainting the damaged sections do give Dinky one of his nine lives back.

Sometimes you find a book filled with charm, others are enticingly rewarding reads from cover to cover. What we have here is a case of both, which is somewhat rare when the topic is wartime history.

*Reviewed by John Ash*

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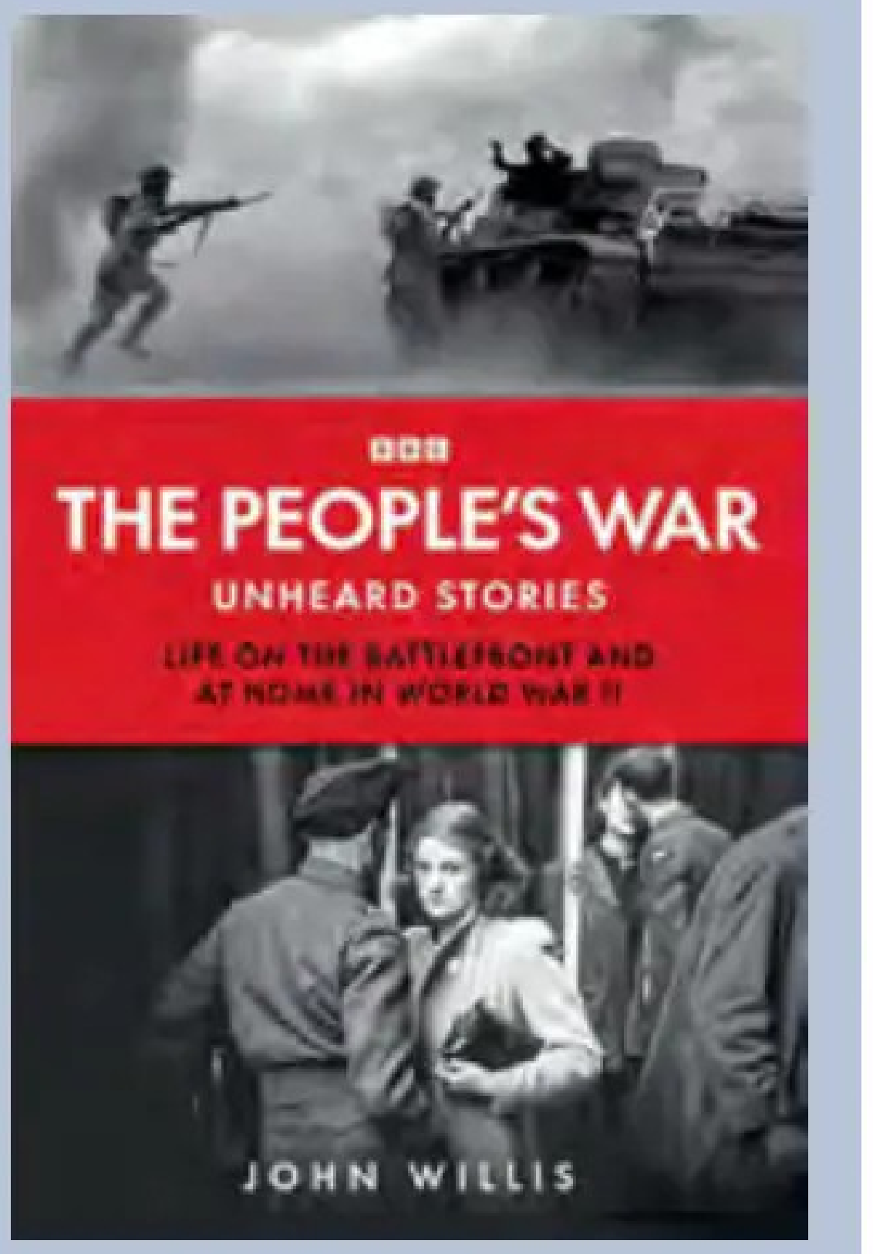
***Appendices:*** *No*

# Books of the Year

The *Britain at War* team selects their top books released in the past 12 months

## *The People's War: Unheard Stories*

### *Life on the Battlefront and at Home in World War Two*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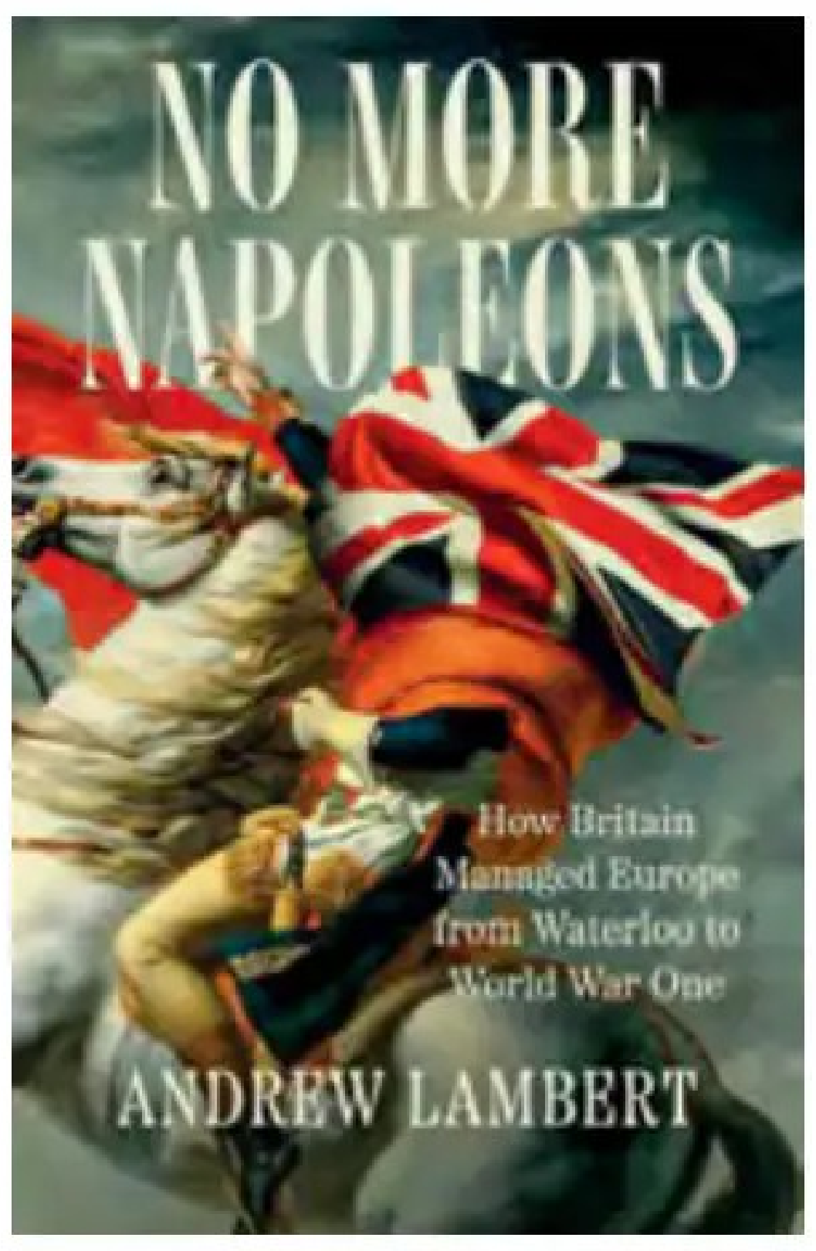
LIFE ON THE BATTLEFRONT AND AT HOME IN WORLD WAR II
JOHN WILLIS

A remarkable everyman compendium of fear and bravery both on the battlefield and the home front, highlighting the camaraderie and community that helped get so many people through the war. The book's 51 chapters span an impressive range of subjects and there is plenty of action, with stories presented from most major actions including the Battle of France, the fall of Singapore, the Second El Alamein, Monte Cassino and Arnhem.

*John Willis, £25, BBC Books,*
*ISBN: 978-1-78594-900-5*

## *No More Napoleons*

### *How Britain Managed Europe from Waterloo to World War One*

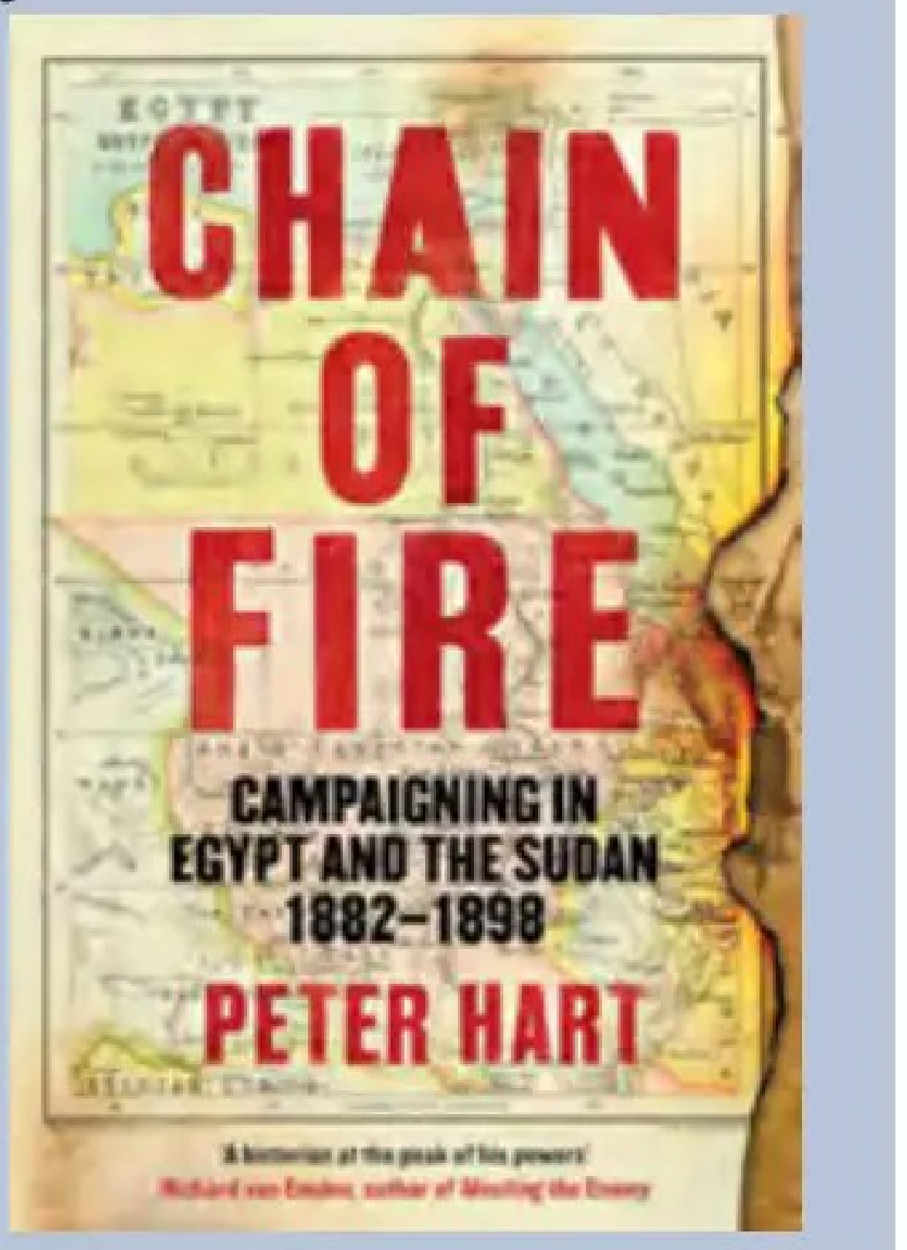

NO MORE NAPOLEONS
How Britain Managed Europe from Waterloo to World War One
ANDREW LAMBERT

After more than two decades of conflict against Napoleonic France, Britain's economy was beset by immense debt. How could it prevent another form of Napoleonic imperialism from gaining power on the continent and secure its economy and security over the century to come? Lambert has reinterpreted British European grand strategy not as a sequence of ad hoc, reactionary decisions, but as a coherent, long-term strategic tradition tailored to the needs of an insular, maritime power.

*Andrew Lambert,*
*£25, Yale University Press,*
*ISBN: 978-0-300-27555-1*

## *Chain of Fire*

### *Campaigning in Egypt and the Sudan, 1882-1898*

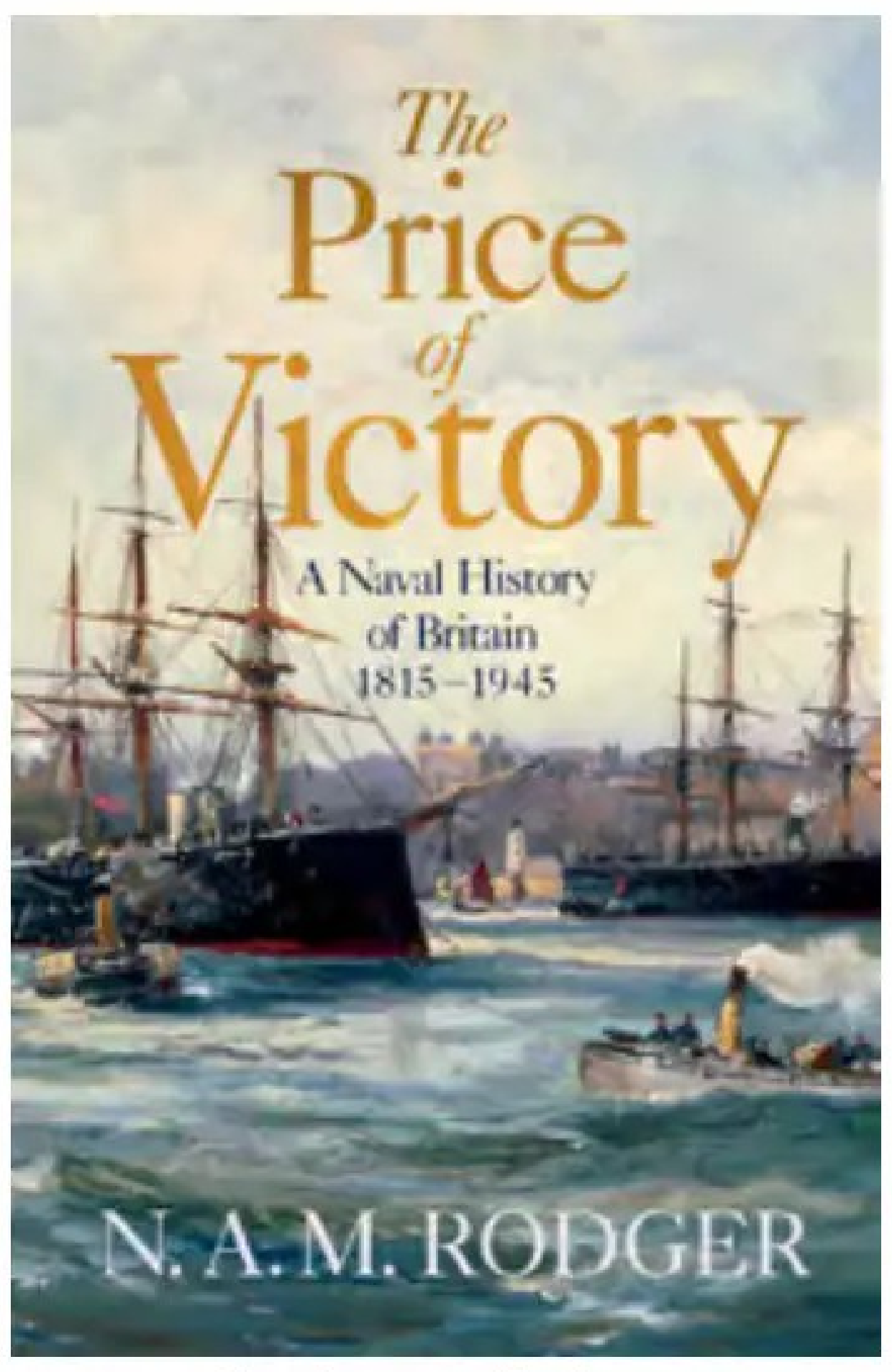

CHAIN OF FIRE
CAMPAIGNING IN EGYPT AND THE SUDAN 1882–1898
PETER HART

Author Peter Hart crafts an insightful account of the campaigns in northern Africa at the end of the 19th Century. Welcome too is his decision not to censor the original material, nor shy away from the bitter realities of colonial warfare. Hart's warts-and-all depiction of imperial ambition clashing violently with indigenous determination isn't black and white, but a grey time for all. *Chain of Fire* is gripping and reads quickly, a punchy tome that leaves you the freedom to make up your own mind.

*Peter Hart, £30, Profile Books,*
*ISBN: 978-1-80081-073-0*

## *The Price of Victory*

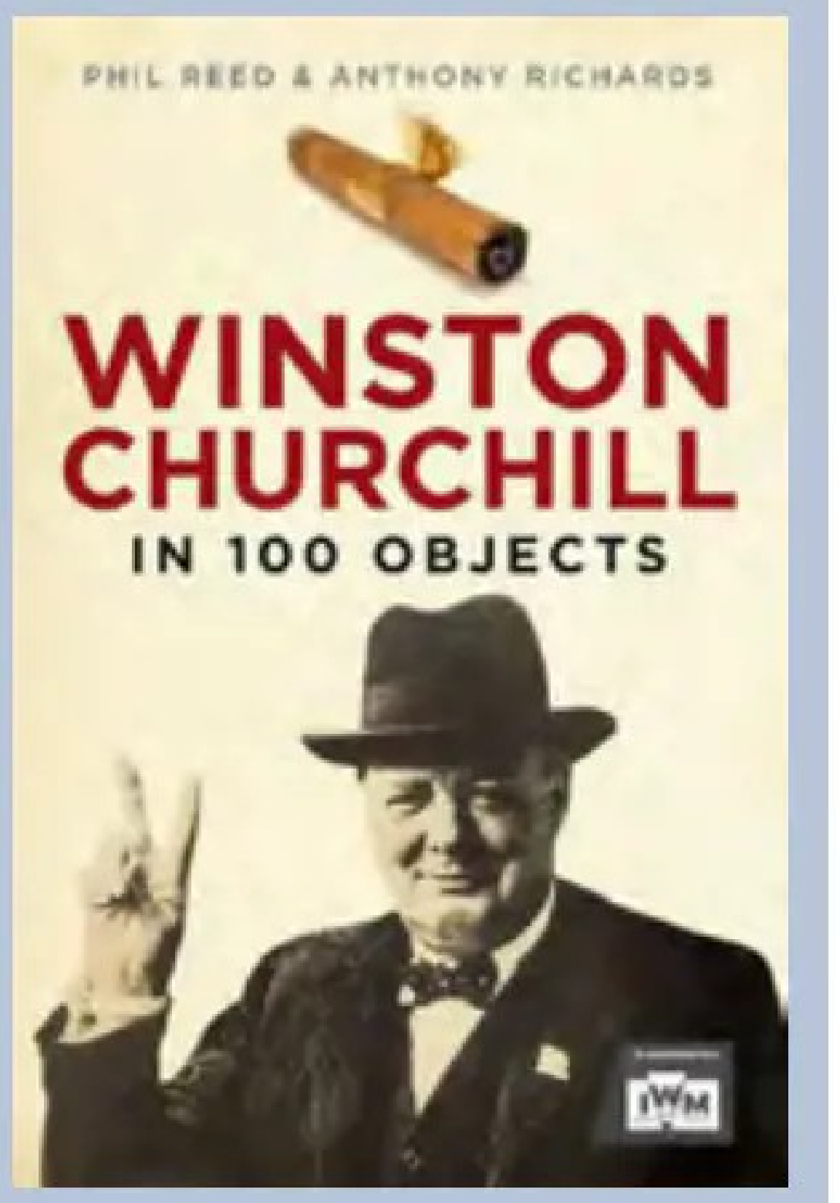
### *A Naval History of Britain, 1918-1945*


The Price of Victory
A Naval History of Britain 1815–1945
N.A.M. RODGER

A highly readable book that covers the vital role of the Royal Navy through most of the 19th Century and the first half of the 20th – a time of rapid change that marked a technological revolution, with wooden-walled ships evolving into ironclads and then steel hulls, sail to steam, reciprocating engines to turbines, paddle wheels to screw propulsion, and decks of cannon to turreted guns. It was a period of discovery and exploration. An obvious must-read for any serious student of naval history.

*N A M Rodger, £40, Allan Lane,*
*ISBN: 978-0-713-99412-4*

## *Winston Churchill in 100 Objects*

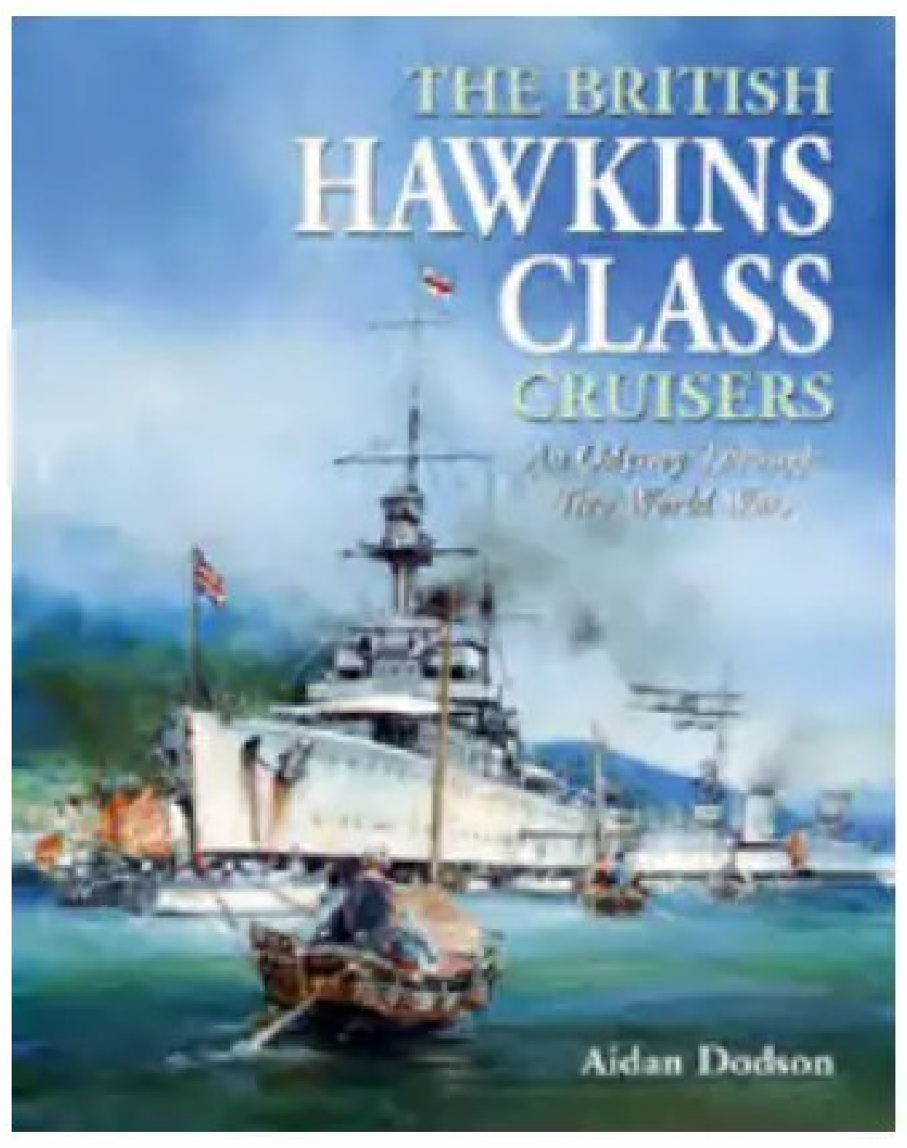

PHIL REED & ANTHONY RICHARDS
WINSTON CHURCHILL
IN 100 OBJECTS
IWM

Deeds may reflect someone's character and legacy, but what can we learn about them from their possessions? Here is a deft selection of items emblematic of Winston Churchill's character and career, representing his life literally from the cradle to the grave with items including a lock of his baby hair, a Hussar uniform, letters from foreign dignitaries and the flag laid across his coffin at his funeral.

*Phil Reed & Anthony Richards,*
*£25, Greenhill Books,*
*ISBN: 978-1-80500-024-2*

## *The British Hawkins Class cruisers*

### *An Odyssey Through Two World Wars*

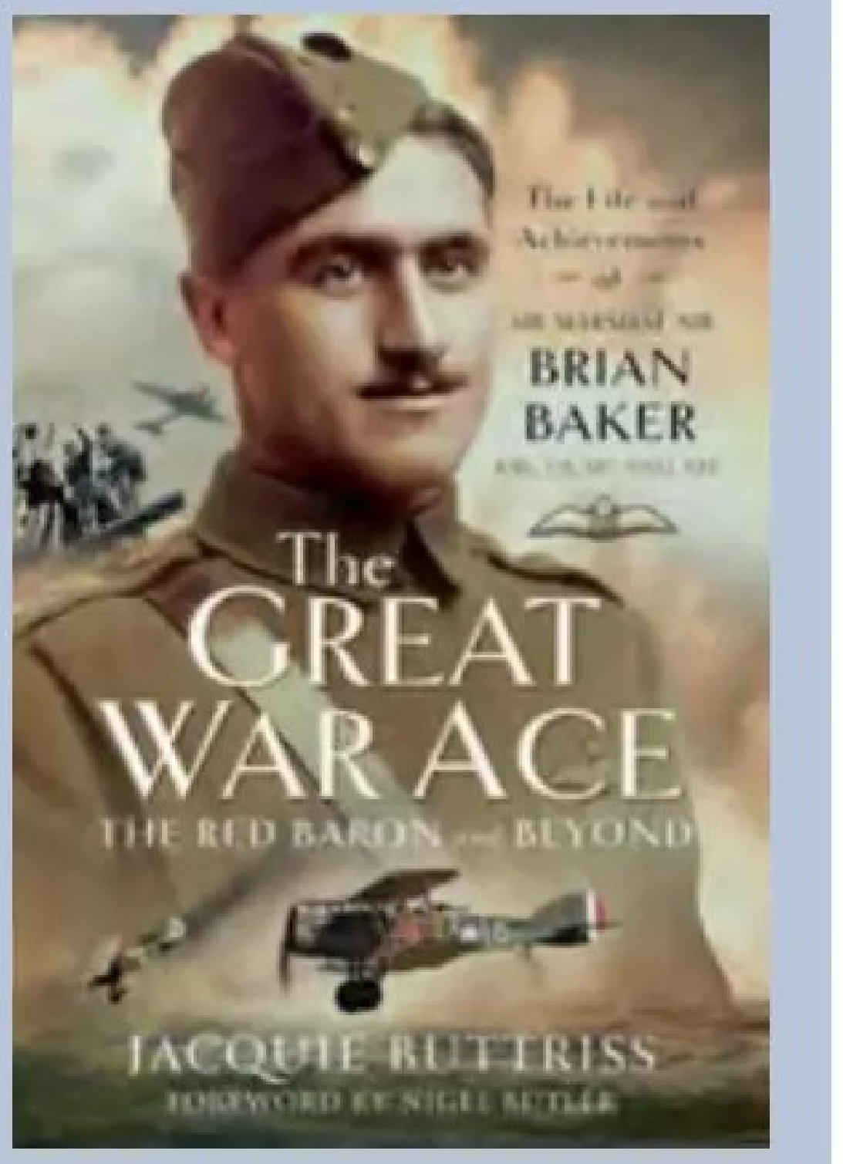

THE BRITISH HAWKINS CLASS CRUISERS
Aidan Dodson

The Seaforth Publishing strategy of pairing naval experts and excellent production qualities to produce weighty, image-filled technical and service histories is a winning one. This time, Aidan Dodson has turned his hand to a most interesting subject: the Royal Navy's Hawkins-class cruisers. He delivers a long, complicated tale of a curious collection of ships that served variously as both light and heavy cruisers, training ships, repair ships and even an early aircraft carrier. This is a well-presented, high-quality title that reads well.

*Aidan Dodson, £40, Seaforth Publishing,*
*ISBN: 978-1-3305-612-0*

## The Great War Ace: The Red Baron and Beyond

### *The Life and Achievements of Air Marshal Sir Brian Baker*


The Life and Achievements of Air Marshal Sir
BRIAN BAKER
The GREAT WAR ACE
THE RED BARON AND BEYOND
JACQUIE BUTTRISS

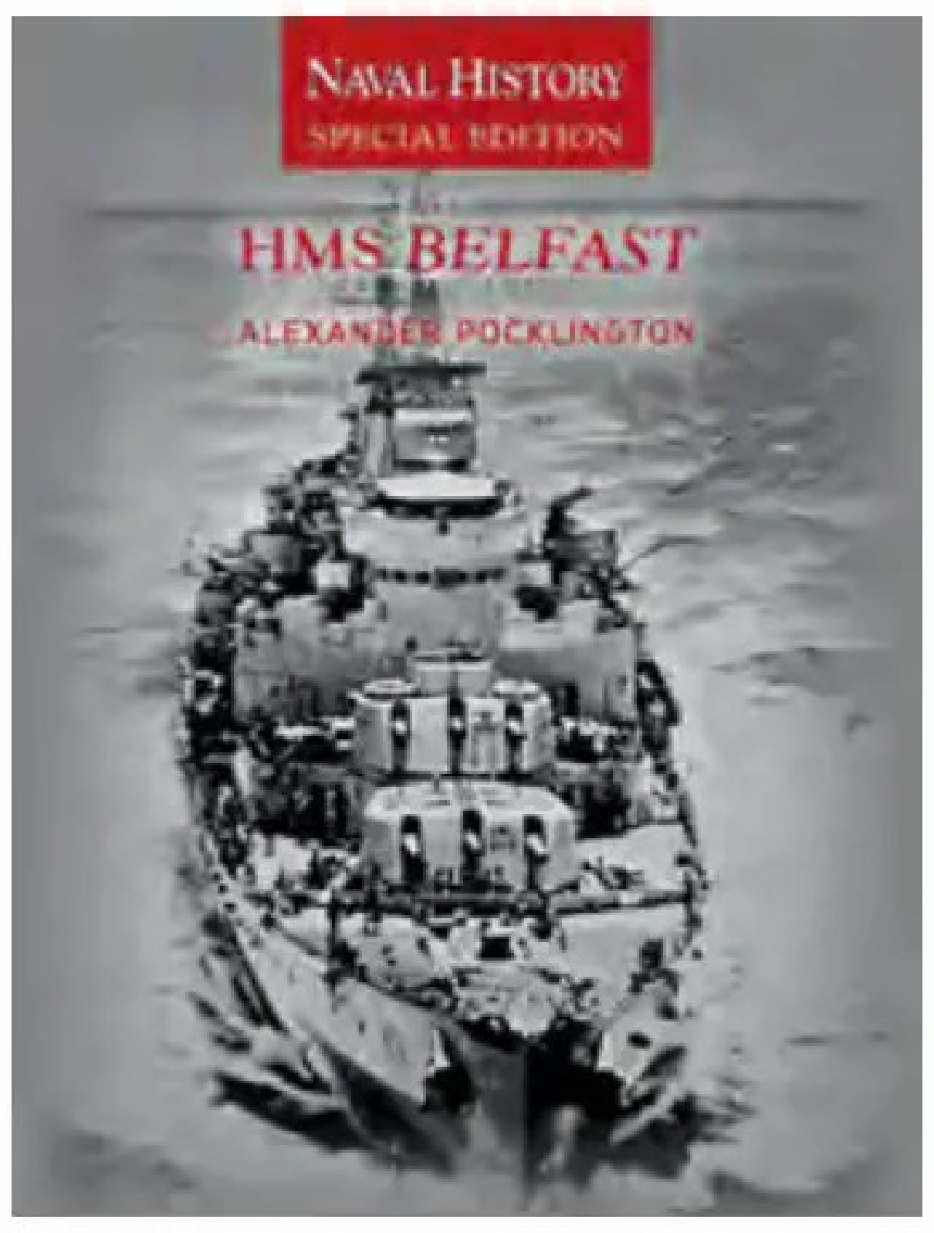
This excellent biography tells the story of a distinguished aviation pioneer and founder member of the RAF.

Brian Baker transferred to the Royal Flying Corps in 1915 and began operational flights in France with just 12 hours flying experience, eventually leaving military service in the Cold War as C-in-C of RAF Transport Command, having helped plan the Berlin Airlift.

Crisply written with the benefit of access to a huge archive of family papers and personal letters, this is a well-crafted story of a true servant to both his service and country.

*Jacquie Buttriss, £25,*
*Pen & Sword,*
*ISBN: 978-1-39905-831-5*

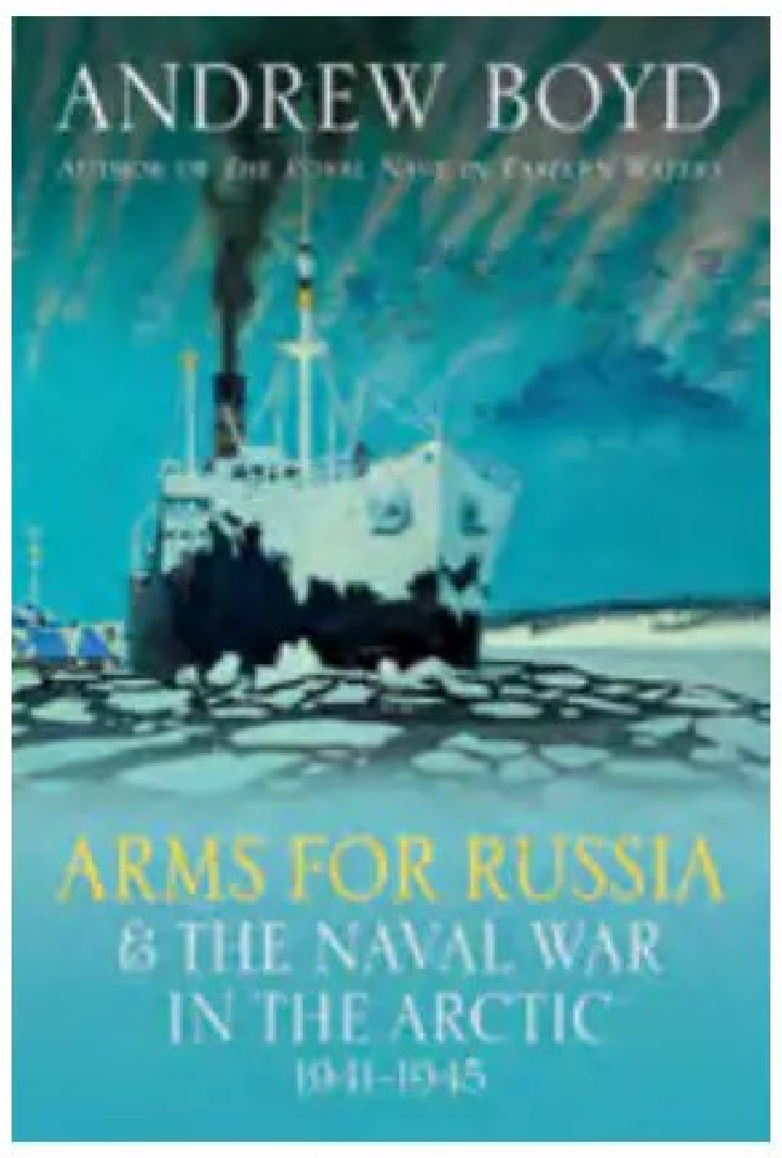
## HMS Belfast


NAVAL HISTORY
SPECIAL EDITION
HMS BELFAST
ALEXANDER POCKLINGTON

Interweaved with the familiar story of a famous ship are intricate details absent elsewhere, such as the retention of HMS *Belfast*'s QF 2-pounder 'pom-poms' over 40mm Bofors cannon because the former's belt feed made it more useful against kamikaze attackers, or that the cruiser sortied into a Chinese bay to retrieve an RAF Vampire jet fighter that had force-landed on a beach. This is the go-to companion for those new to the ship's history, but also a handy reference for experts.

*Alexander Pocklington, £14.99,*
*Naval History/USNI,*
*ISBN: 978-1-68247-982-7*

## Arms for Russia & the Naval War in the Arctic 1941-1945

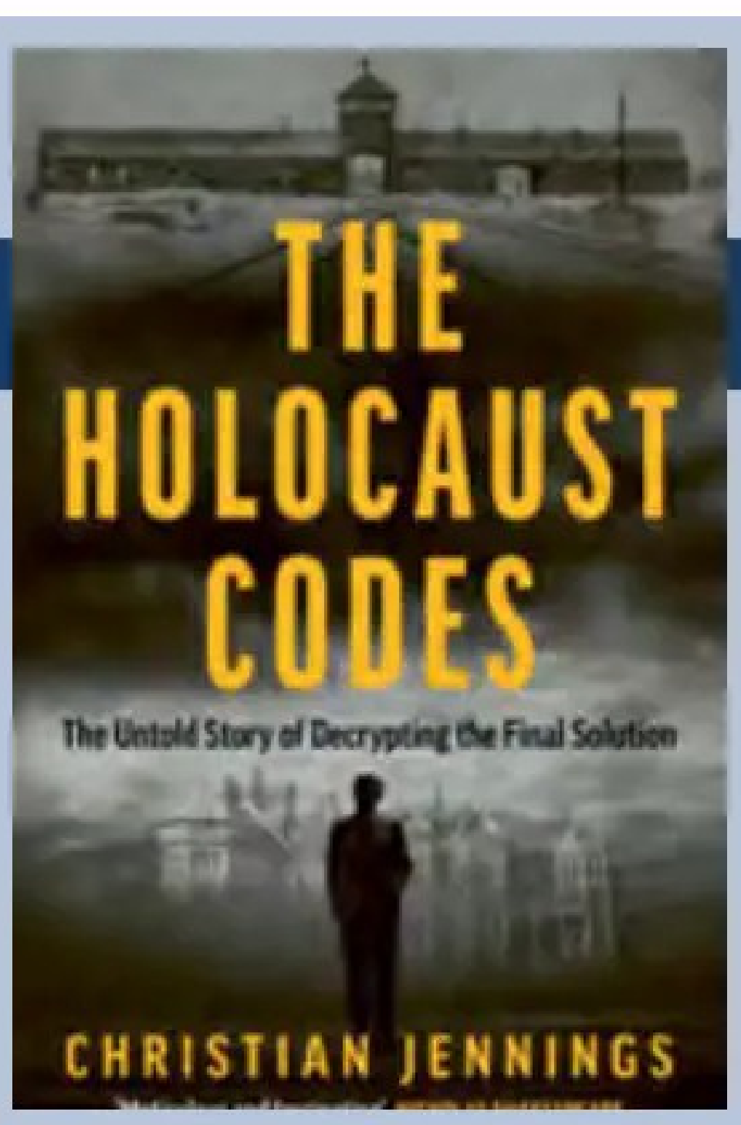

ANDREW BOYD
ARMS FOR RUSSIA
& THE NAVAL WAR IN THE ARCTIC
1941-1945

A rich narrative based on an in-depth interrogation of naval primary sources, this book's focus is twofold: highlighting the logistical issues in shipping supplies through inhospitable waters, while assessing the high-stakes naval battles that punctuated the war in the Arctic. Unlike other historians who have analysed the struggles of the convoys within the parameters of geography, Boyd explains how the Royal Navy and its Allies fought intense, three-dimensional threats that required up to 20% of the navy's fleet resources at any given time.

*Andrew Boyd, £35, Seaforth Publishing, ISBN: 978-1-39903-886-7*

## The Holocaust Codes

### *The Untold Story of Decrypting the Final Solution*


THE HOLOCAUST CODES
The Untold Story of Decrypting the Final Solution
CHRISTIAN JENNINGS

During World War Two, German messages communicating the progress of rounding up and killing Jews in newly occupied Soviet territory were intercepted by British intelligence organisations. This led to Nigel de Grey, a British cryptographer at Bletchley Park, decrypting the communications of an Austrian SS officer, Hermann Höfle, who attempted to conceal the mass killings. A thought-provoking shake-up to the general understanding of the role of Bletchley Park in World War Two that is much more than a study of German police codes used in the Soviet Union.

*Christian Jennings, £22, John Blake/Bonnier Books, ISBN: 978-1-78946-726-0*

## Honourable mentions

## *Eagle Days*

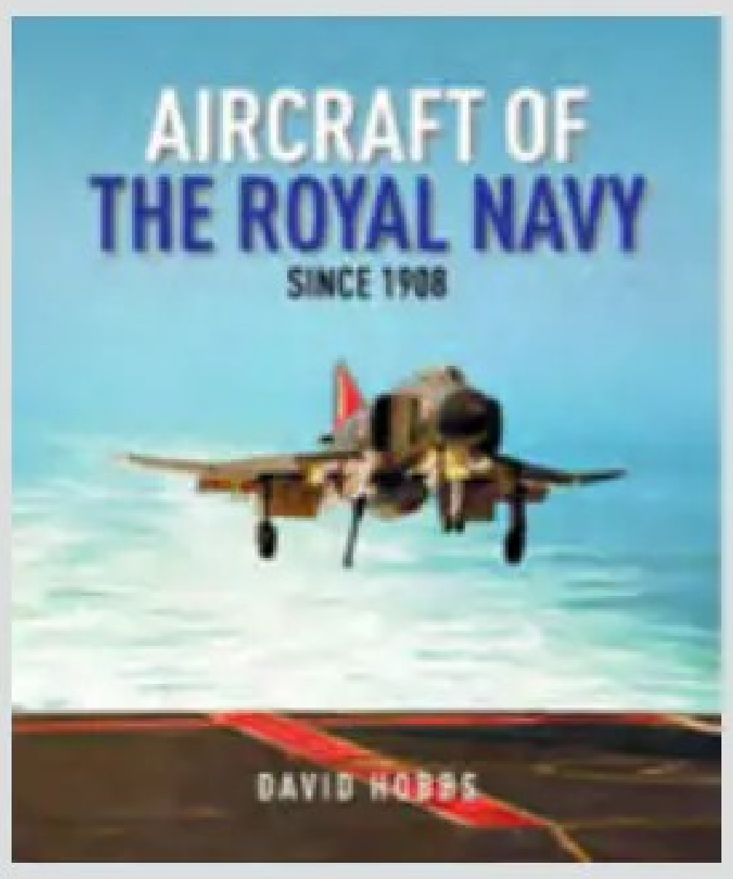
### *Life and Death for the Luftwaffe in the Battle of Britain*

VICTORIA TAYLOR
EAGLE DAYS
LIFE AND DEATH for the LUFTWAFFE in the BATTLE OF BRITAIN

The strength of Victoria Taylor's debut book is the change in perspective. This is a Battle of Britain book, one of the most heavily analysed subjects in the 1939-1945 war, that provides new sources and analysis to explore the experiences, motivations and emotions of Luftwaffe personnel during the air campaign against Britain.

*Victoria Taylor, £25, Head of Zeus/Bloomsbury, ISBN: 978-1-80454-999-5*

## Aircraft of the Royal Navy Since 1908

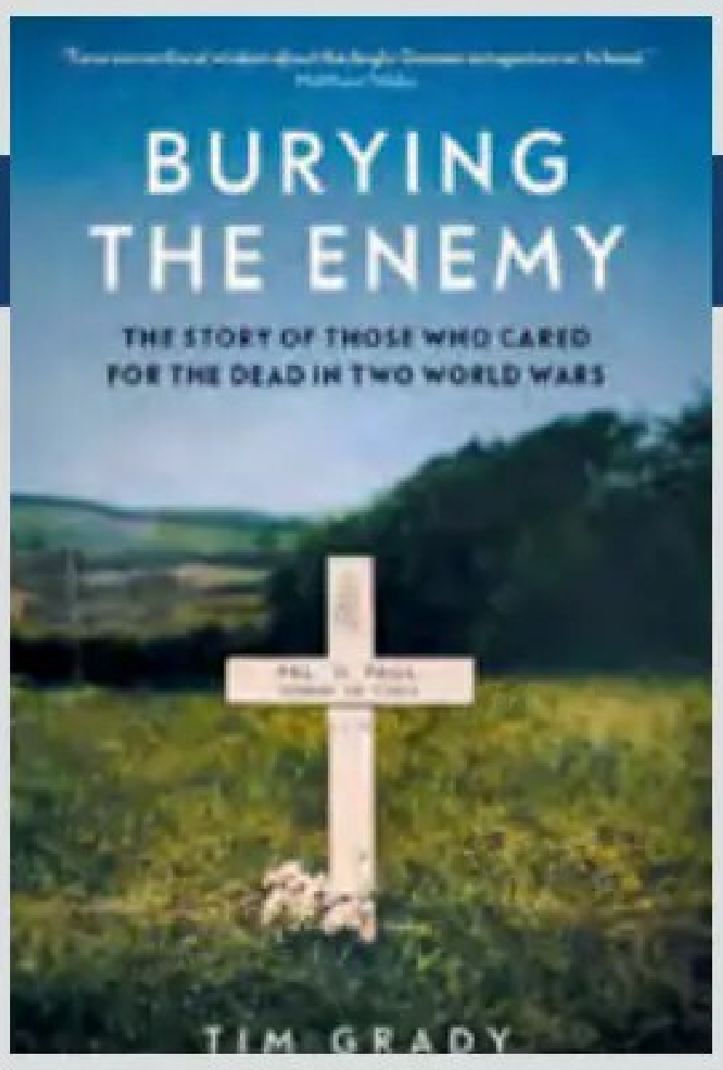

AIRCRAFT OF THE ROYAL NAVY
SINCE 1908
DAVID HOBBS

This beautifully produced, large format book is written by former fixed-wing carrier pilot and acknowledged expert in the subject, David Hobbs. It describes in detail more than 400 aircraft – including airships and target drones – to have served with the Royal Navy through two world wars and into the 21st Century.

*David Hobbs, £50, Seaforth Publishing, ISBN: 978-1-39908-952-4*

## Burying the Enemy

### *The Story of Those Who Cared for the Dead in Two World Wars*

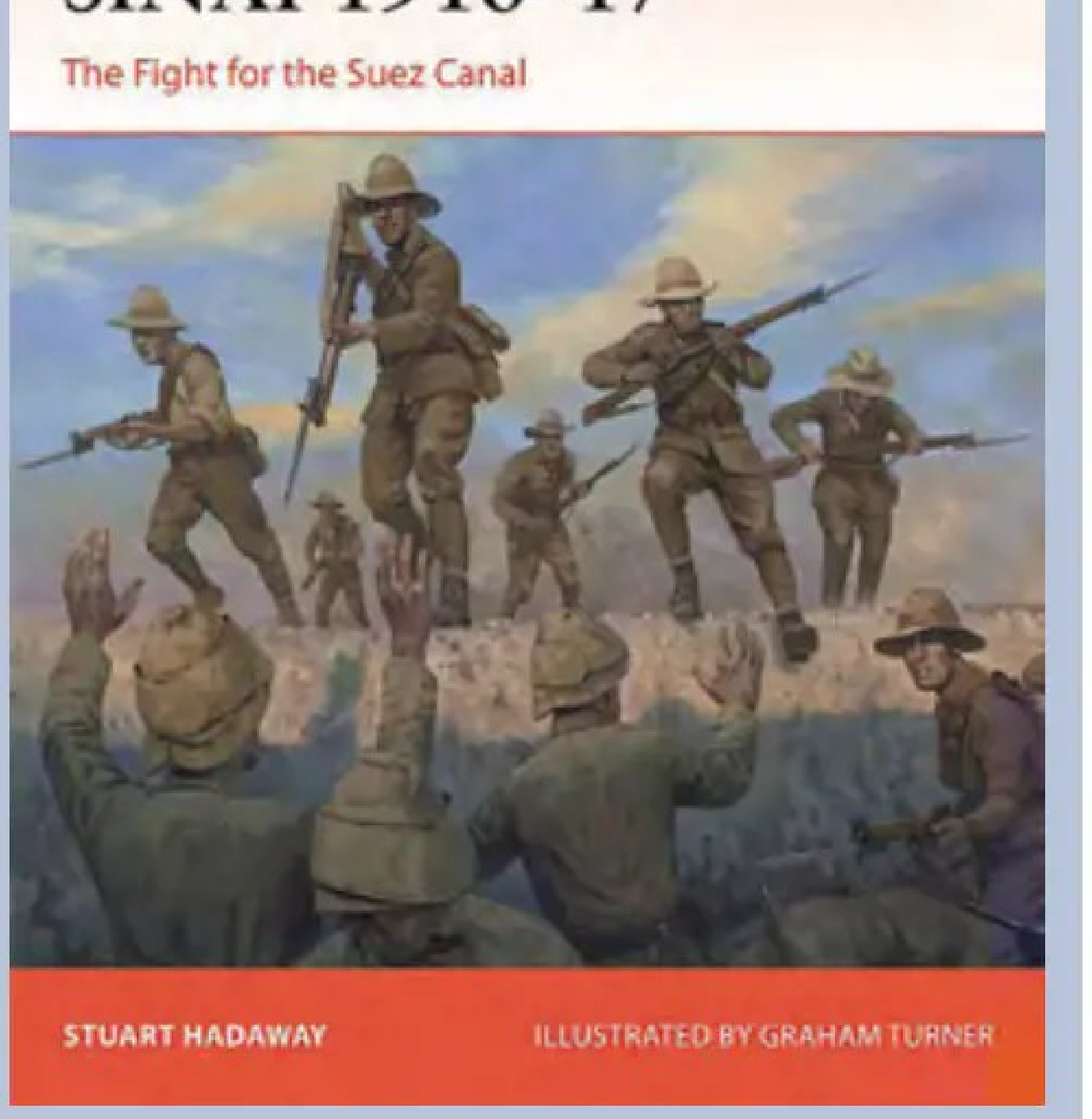

BURYING THE ENEMY
THE STORY OF THOSE WHO CARED FOR THE DEAD IN TWO WORLD WARS
TIM GRADY

This book offers insight into the complex relationship between memory, commemoration and reconciliation by exploring an overlooked aspect of Anglo-German relations, demonstrating how the treatment of enemy dead was not merely a logistical or administrative issue, but also a social one.

*Tim Grady, £25, Yale University Press, ISBN: 978-0-300-27397-7*

## Sinai 1916-17

### *The Fight for the Suez Canal*



This book is a lesson in how much can be achieved in a slim 96 pages. Stuart Hadaway delivers a book that's modest in length, yet brimming with detail about an often-overlooked theatre of World War One.

As Hadaway stresses, the Sinai campaign was more than a sideshow. In early August 1916, the Ottomans, pushing across the Sinai with the aim of cutting the Suez Canal, clashed with Britain's Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF) at the Battle of Romani. The stakes could not have been higher: the canal was the artery keeping Britain, France and Italy supplied. Over two days of hard fighting, the Ottomans were beaten back, a defeat that secured Allied supply lines, marked the first major land victory against the Ottoman Empire and set the stage for the EEF's advance into Palestine.

The author combines a clear authority of the subject with an easygoing narrative, guiding the reader through the commanders, the troops and the key decisions influencing the campaign, yet keeping the writing accessible so the book never becomes burdened by technicalities. Likewise, as you would expect from Osprey, the visual presentation is excellent. The narrative is supported by a rich mix of maps, 3D diagrams, period photographs and colour artwork. Graham Turner's paintings are particularly pleasing.

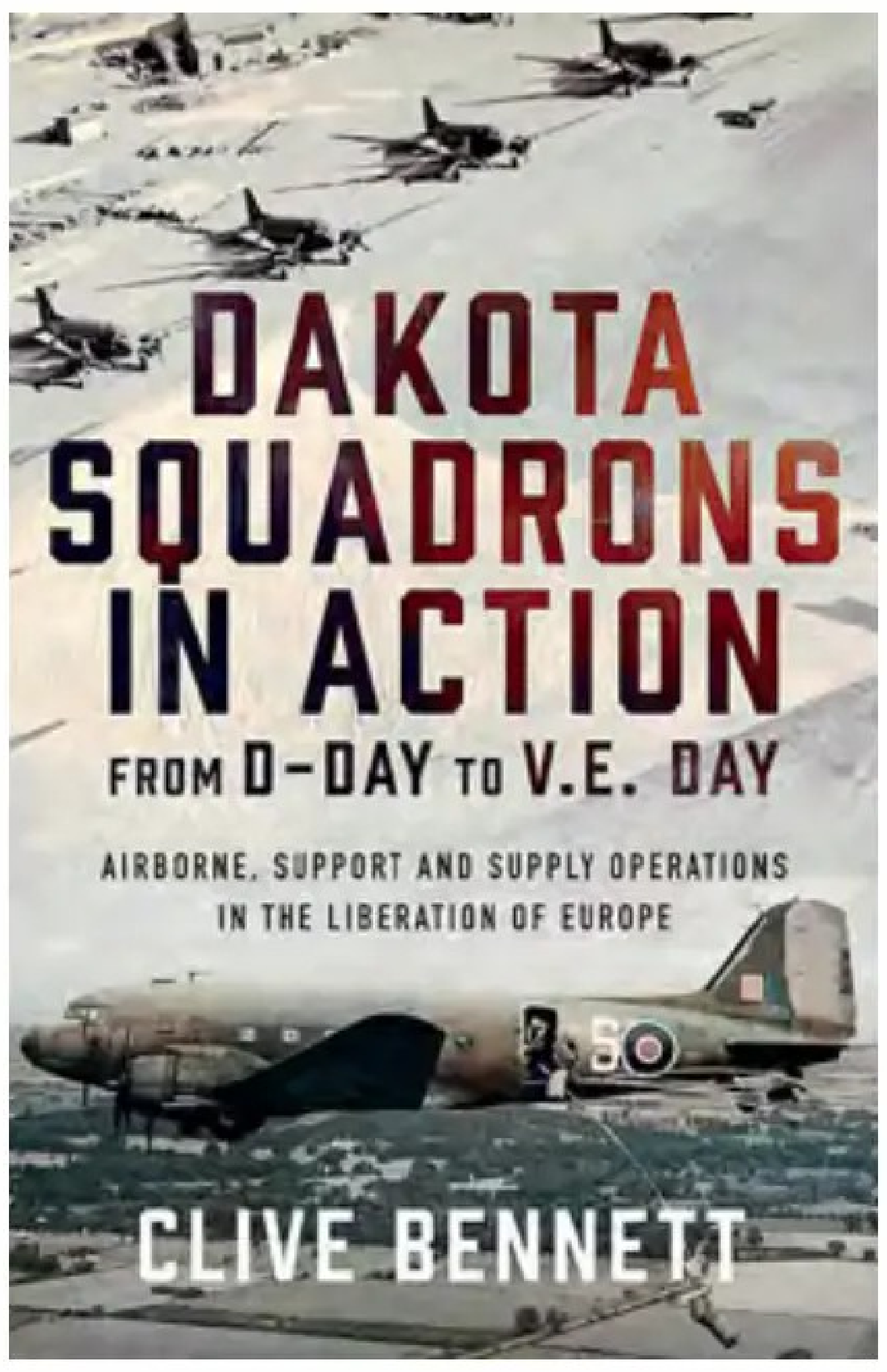
This is another brilliant volume in Osprey's *Campaign* series: tightly written, beautifully illustrated and packed with more information than its page count might suggest.

*Reviewed by Tom Baker*

**Author**: Stuart Hadaway
**Publisher**: Osprey Publishing (ospreypublishing.com)
**ISBN**: 978-1-47286-779-7
**Softback & eBook**: 96 pages
**RRP**: £15.29 (£12.23 eBook)

## Dakota Squadrons in Action from D-Day to VE Day

### *Airborne, support and supply operations in the liberation of Europe*


DAKOTA SQUADRONS IN ACTION
FROM D-DAY TO V.E. DAY
AIRBORNE, SUPPORT AND SUPPLY OPERATIONS IN THE LIBERATION OF EUROPE
CLIVE BENNETT

The Allied invasion of France in June 1944 and the subsequent campaign in northwest Europe saw three major airborne operations: D-Day, Arnhem and the Rhine Crossing. In each, the RAF's Dakota squadrons played a pivotal role in delivering paratroopers, towing gliders and subsequent resupplies into the battle area. Unarmed and usually flying in daylight, these operations were dangerous and losses were at times crippling – especially at Arnhem.

The part played by Dakotas in the liberation of Europe is often overlooked and Clive Bennett's book helps correct that. His narrative is based on unit records accompanied by often moving personal accounts. Almost a quarter of the pages are devoted to listings of crews of each squadron on each of the three operations – so far as records allow – that serves as a memorial to all participants, not least the aeromedical nurses who took part.

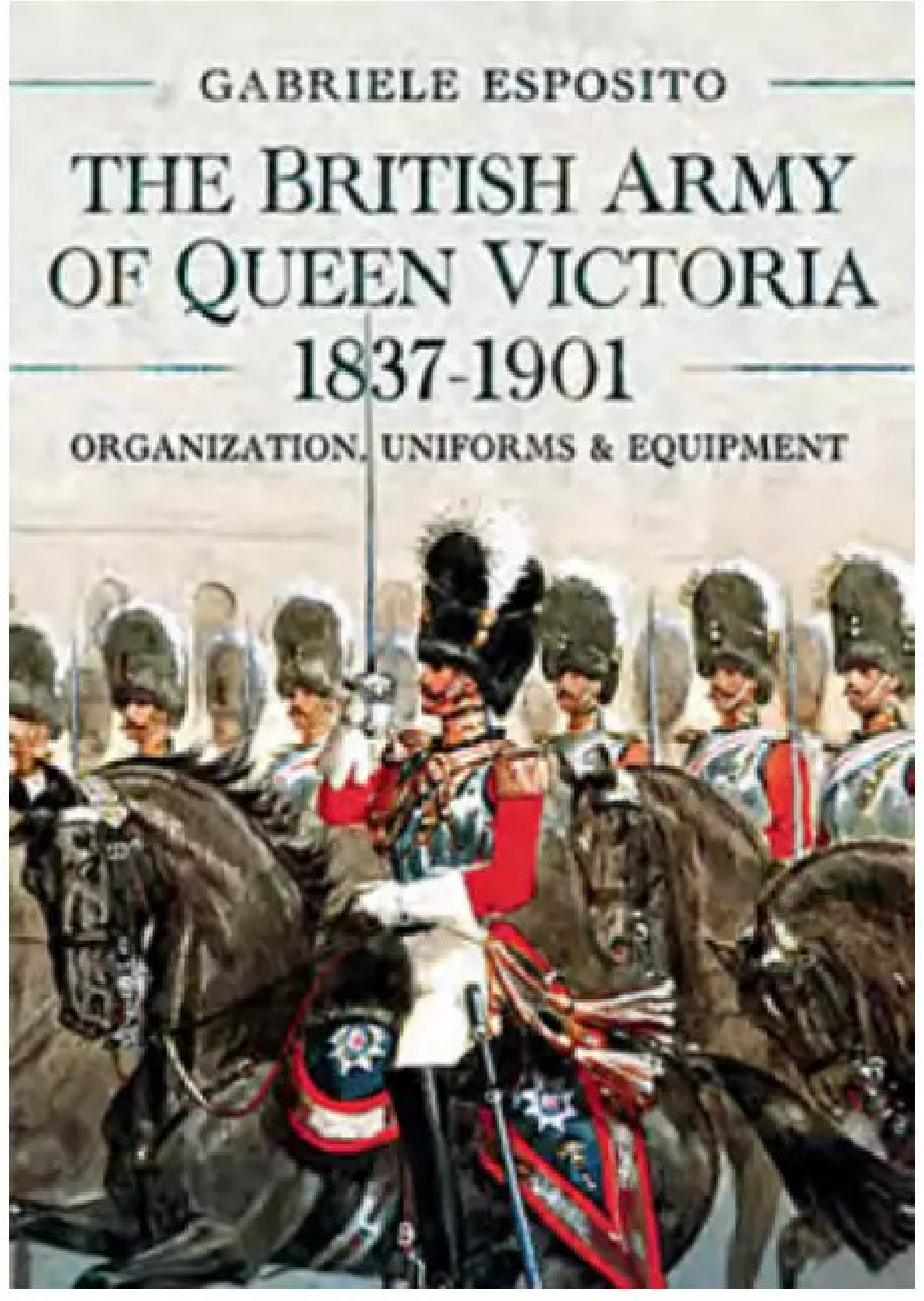
A worthy and welcome addition to the World War Two bookshelf.

*Reviewed by Andrew Thomas*

**Author**: Clive Bennett
**Publisher**: Air World/Pen & Sword (pen-and-sword.co.uk)
**ISBN**: 978-1-03612-119-8
**Hardback & eBook**: 291 pages
**RRP**: £29.99 (£14.99 eBook)

## The British Army of Queen Victoria 1837-1901

### *Organization, uniforms & equipment*


GABRIELE ESPOSITO
THE BRITISH ARMY OF QUEEN VICTORIA
1837-1901
ORGANIZATION, UNIFORMS & EQUIPMENT

The 19th century was a transformative period for the British Army. Across Queen Victoria's long reign, her soldiers underwent sweeping reforms in organisation, weaponry and appearance while serving on campaigns across the globe. In this book, author Gabriele Esposito offers a richly researched and finely presented survey of the regiments and men who defined this fascinating era.

Esposito, known for his expertise in uniformology and Victorian warfare, covers every major branch of the service: the Foot Guards, line and Highland infantry, rifle corps, cavalry in its varied forms, artillery, engineers and support arms. His scope extends beyond the regular army to include the Royal Marines, volunteers and foreign units that fought under the British banner. As well as tracing how the army was structured and deployed, he details how troops adapted to the dramatic shifts in doctrine and technology that marked the century: redcoats gradually giving way to khaki or muskets being replaced by breech-loaders and then bolt-actions

Throughout, dozens of colour plates showcase uniforms, equipment, and weapons in striking detail. These illustrations, supported by Esposito's commentary, vividly convey the look, character and evolution of the Victorian soldier.

A pairing of meticulous research and high-quality artwork makes this book a valuable reference and an engaging read. It will appeal to students of military history, uniform collectors and anyone fascinated by the soldiers of Queen Victoria's army.

*Reviewed by Tom Baker*

**Author**: Gabriele Esposito
**Publisher**: Pen & Sword
**ISBN**: 978-1-03610-329-3
**Hardback & eBook**: 240 pages
**RRP**: £25 (£14.99 eBook)

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CHAIN OF FIRE
CAMPAIGNING IN
THE HOLOCAUST CODES
The Untold Story of Decrypting the Final Solution
The Price of Victory
A Naval History of Britain 1815–1945
PHIL REED & ANTHONY RICHARDS
WINSTON CHURCHILL IN 100 OBJECTS
THE PEOPLE'S WAR
UNHEARD STORIES
BRIAN BAKER
The GREAT WAR ACE
VICTORIA TAYLOR
EAGLE DAYS
LIFE AND DEATH for the LUFTWAFFE in the BATTLE OF BRITAIN
ANDREW BOYD
AIRCRAFT OF THE ROYAL NAVY SINCE 1908
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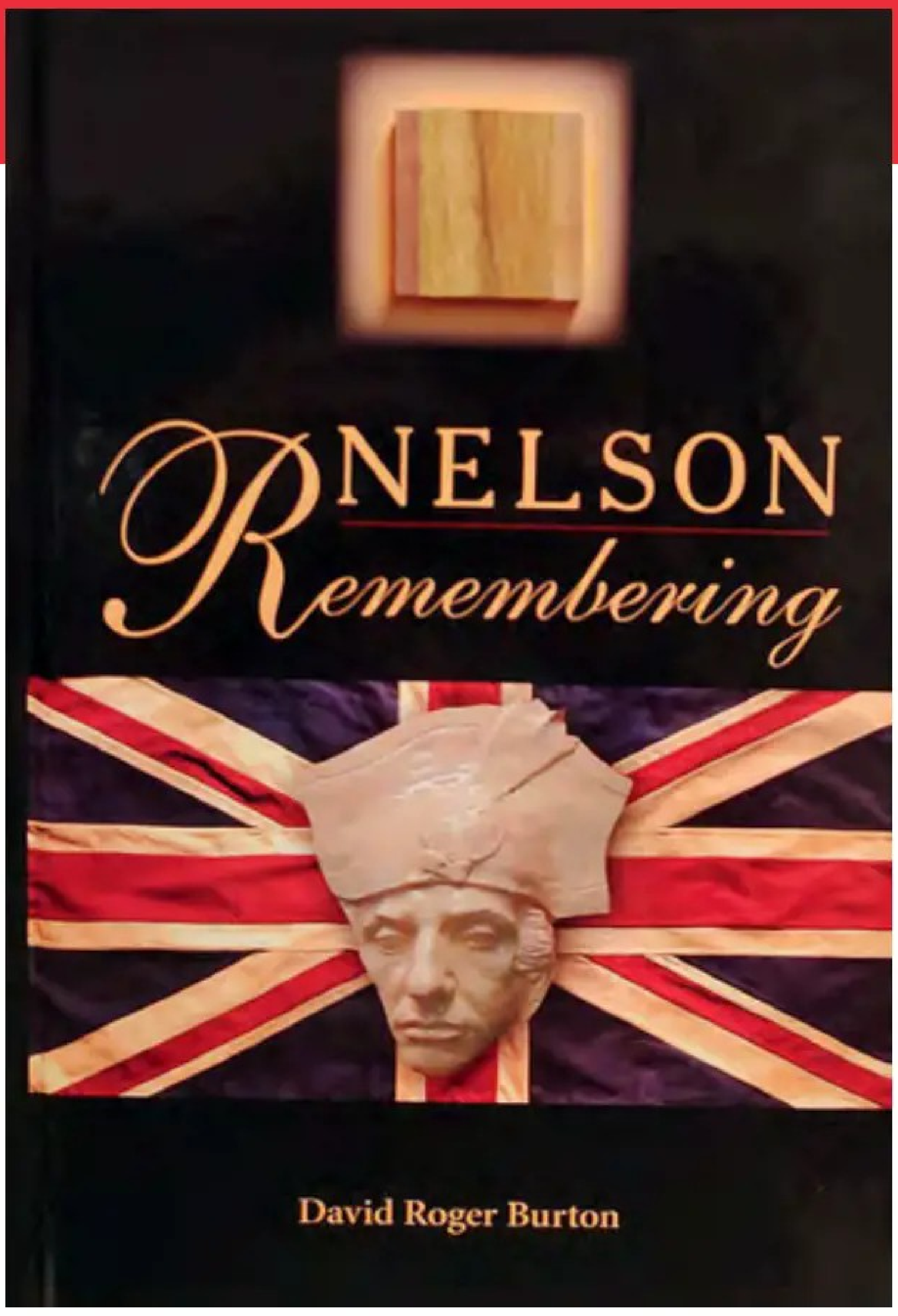
# Gift ideas for

Discover the perfect presents this festive season with our Christmas gift guide of books, collectables and wartime-inspired treasures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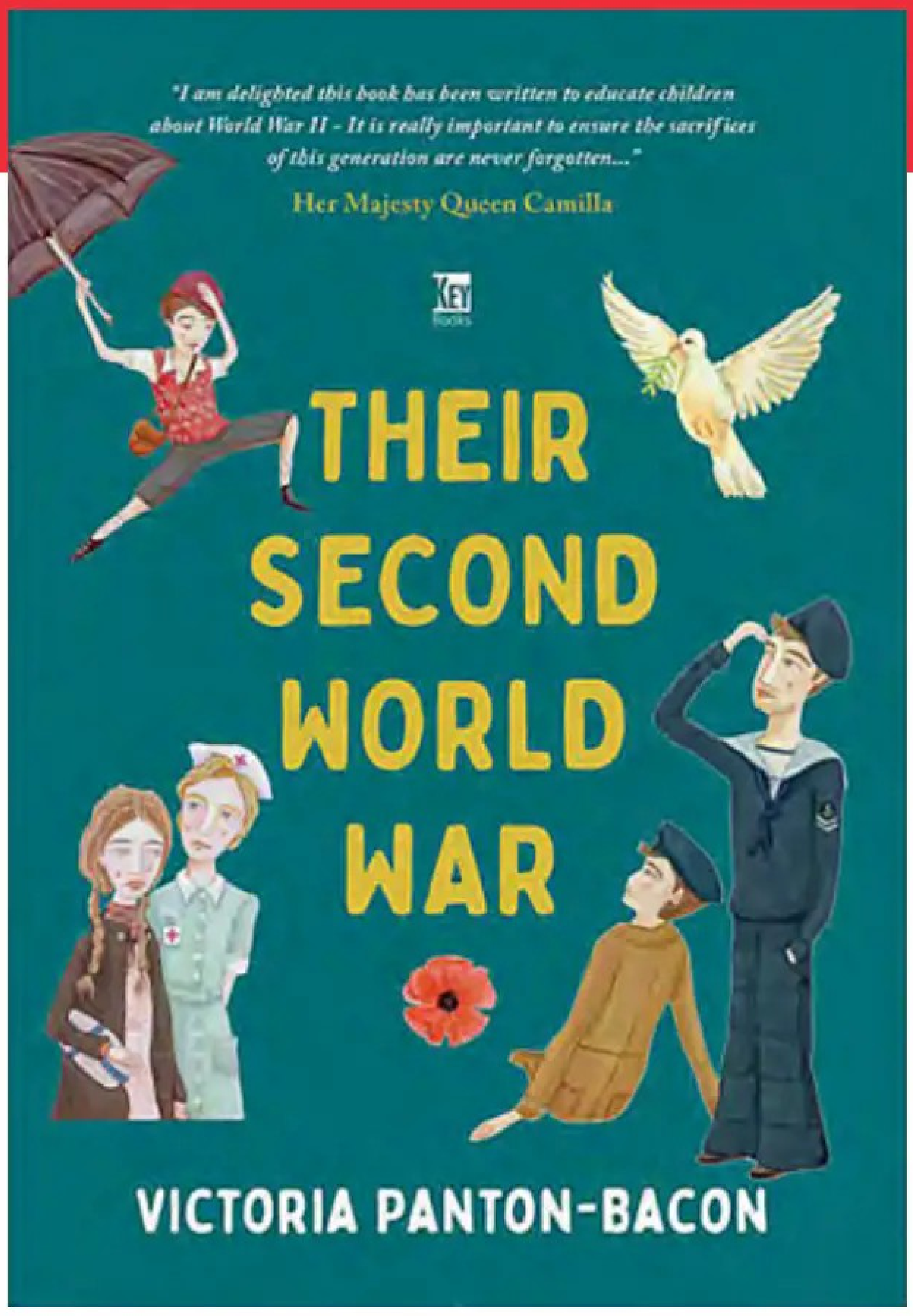
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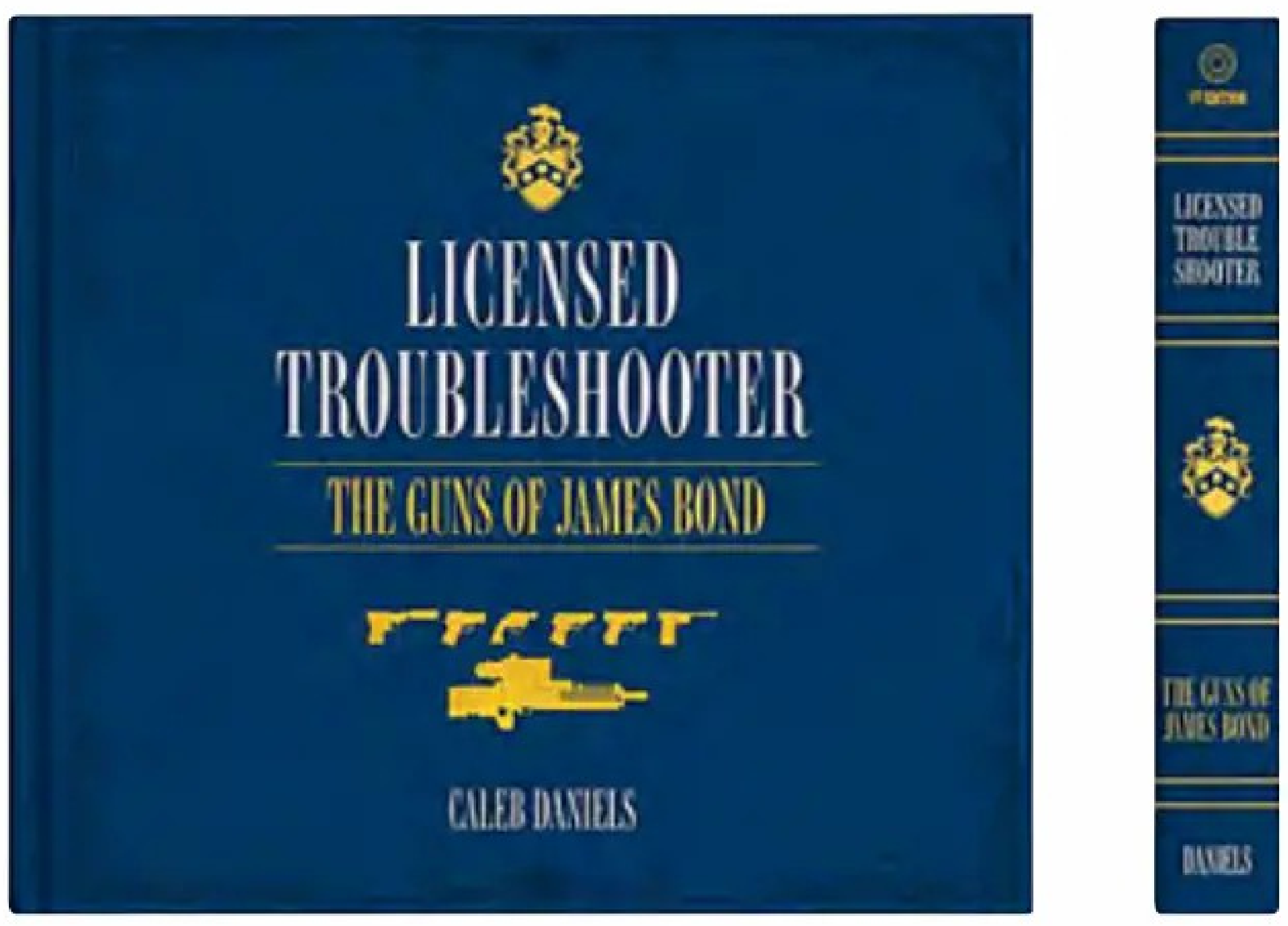
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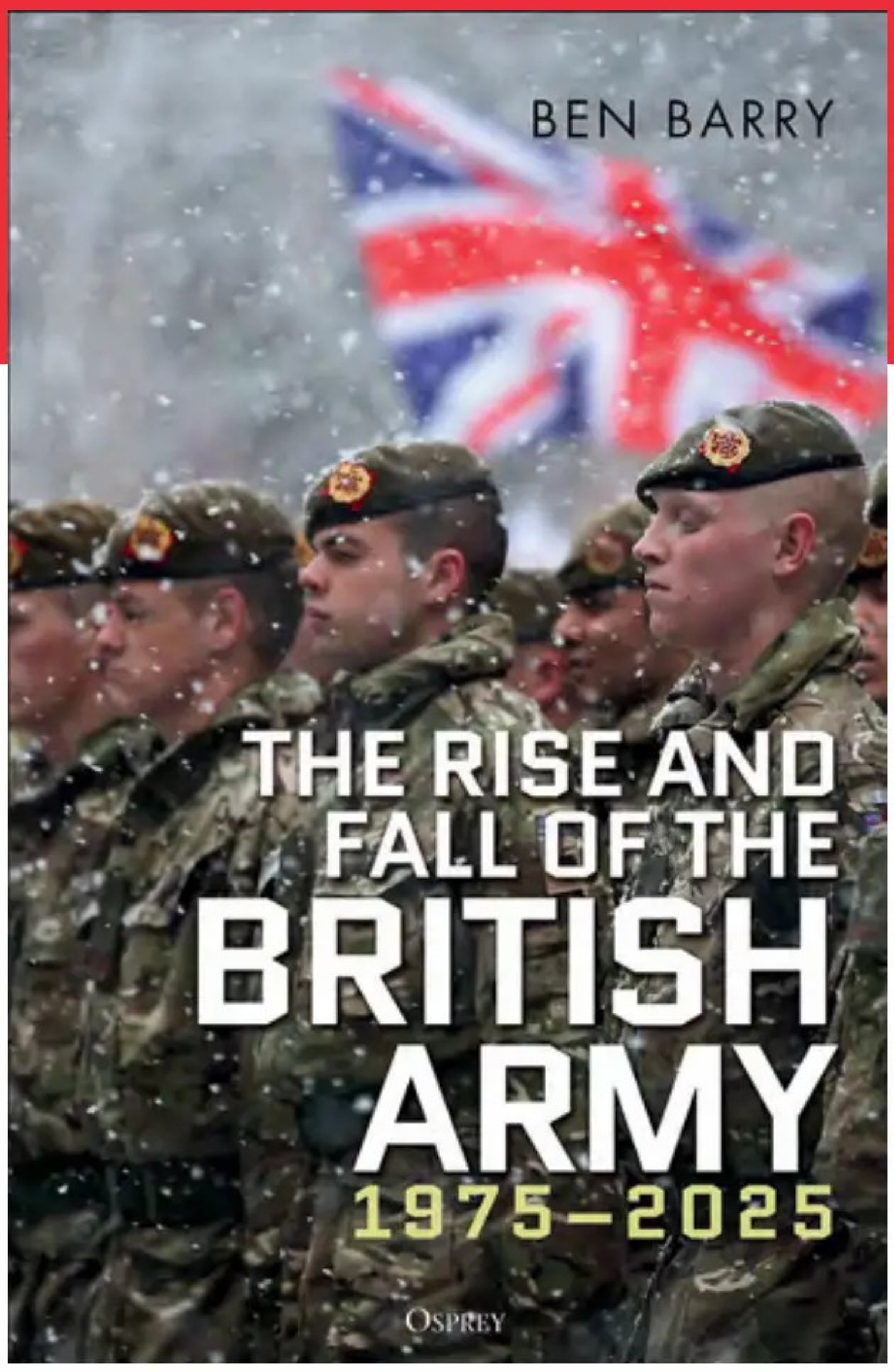

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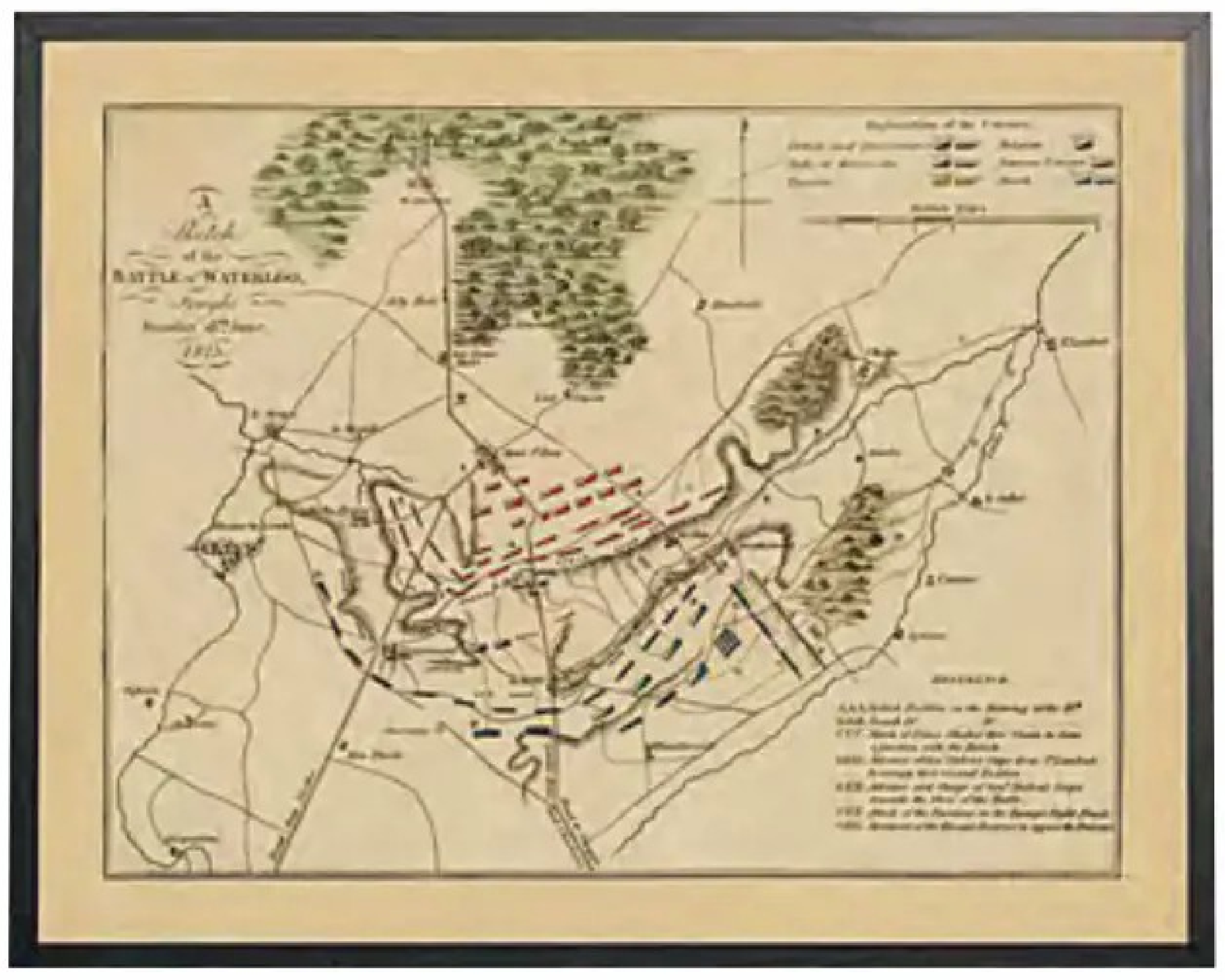

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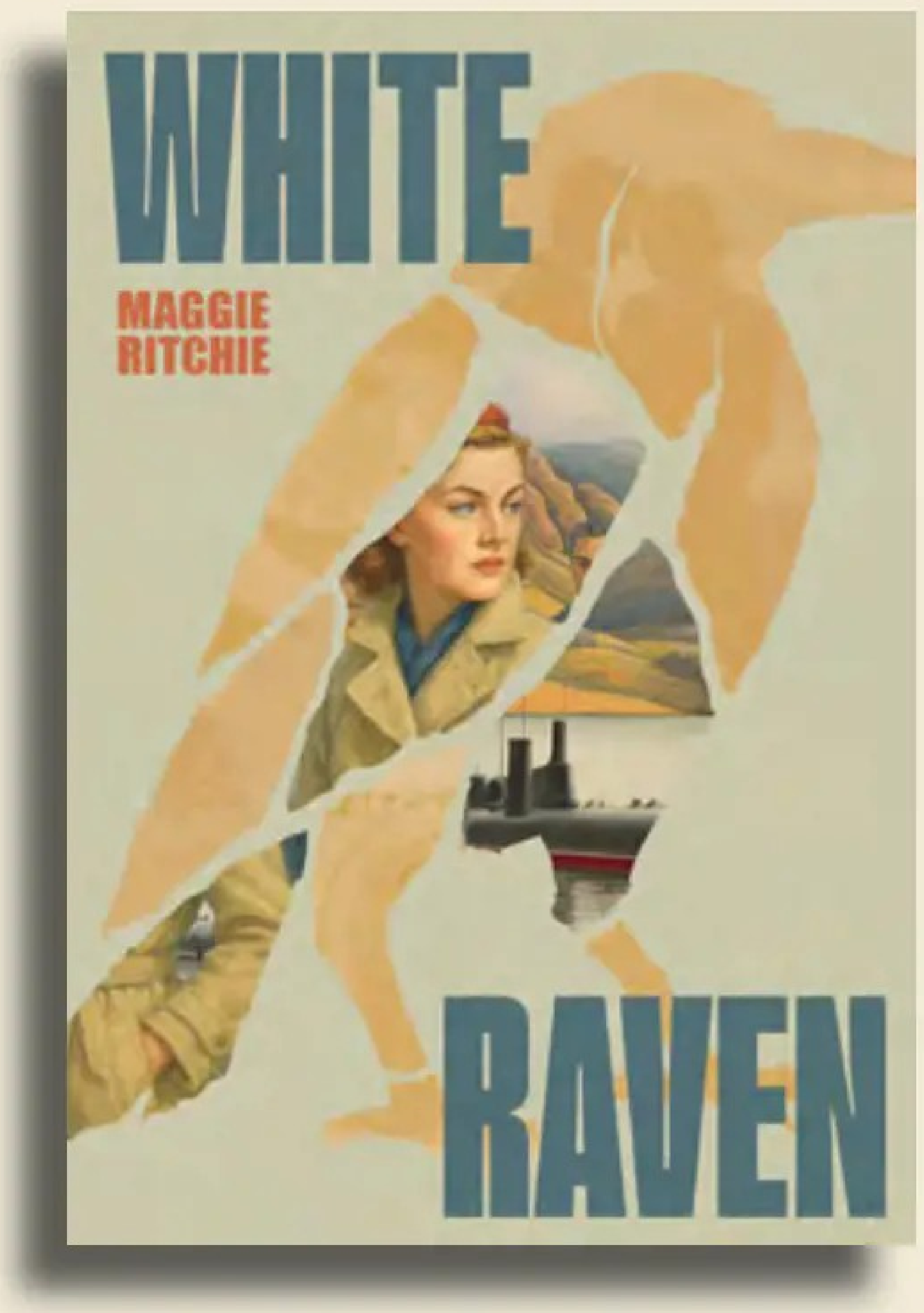

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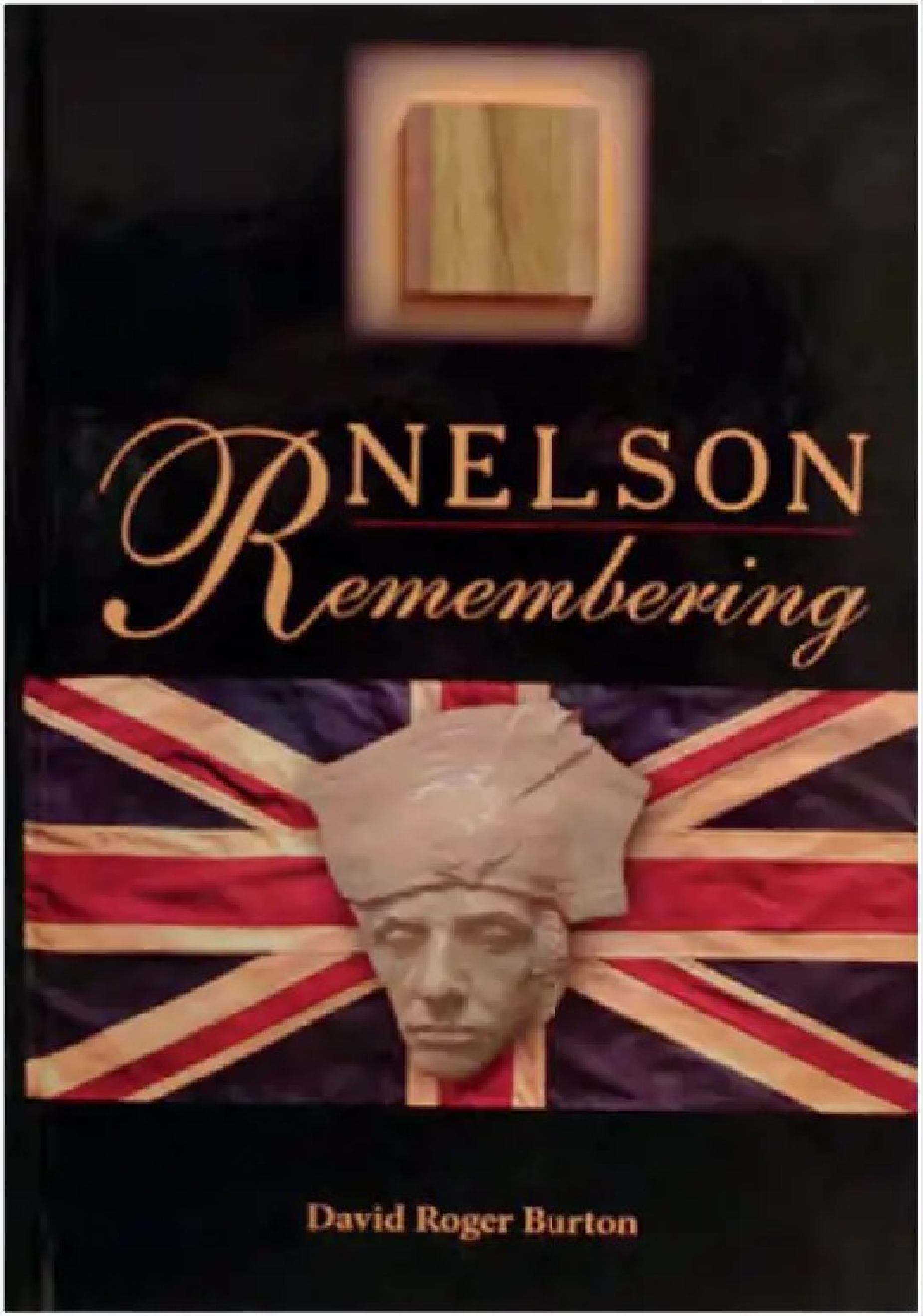
# Nelson Remembering

## A new book by David Roger Burton



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# BATTLE BUFFALOS

The American-designed LVT played a key transportation and assault role in Anglo-Commonwealth operations during 1944-45. **Michael E Haskew** profiles the development of the famous amphibian that brought troops from ship to shore

Clearing the Scheldt was essential to Allied plans. Even though the Belgian city of Antwerp had been captured in September 1944, and its deepwater port taken virtually intact, the Germans barred entry from the sea by occupying the islands and coastline of the Scheldt, preventing Allied shipping from reaching Antwerp, 60 miles inland from the North Sea, and exacerbating the logistics problems that slowed the drive into the Third Reich.

After the failure of Operation Market Garden, Field Marshal Montgomery's ambitious foray into the Netherlands to facilitate a dagger-thrust into Germany's industrial heart, Monty's focus returned to Antwerp. There was no doubt the port had to be accessible, therefore, Monty set in motion Operation Infatuate, the plan to clear the surrounding banks of the Scheldt and capture Walcheren. Infatuate was ultimately successful – though a nasty endeavour. The lynchpin to its success, particularly the seizure of soggy Walcheren, was the LVT 'Buffalo' or 'Water Buffalo'.

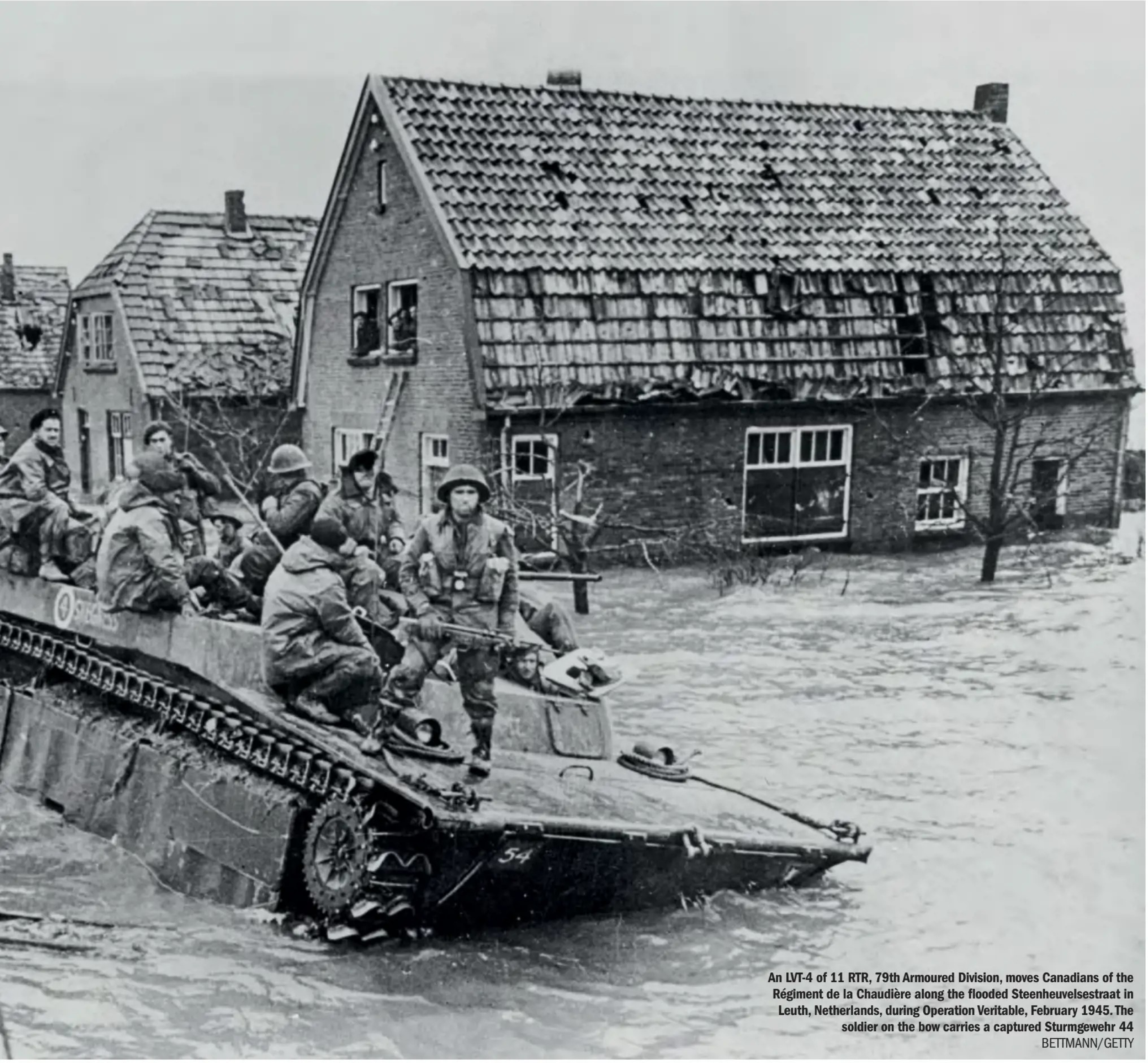
The LVT – Land Vehicle Tracked – family was an ingenious but hardly handsome development born of the necessity to transport supplies and ultimately men into battle across difficult terrain, namely the beaches of islands and atolls in the Pacific and later the flooded, marshy landscape of northwest Europe, river-laced Italy and the swampy jungles of Burma. The LVT was distinctly American, but through Lend-Lease the British military came into possession of 200 of the amphibious tractors in late 1943. The original version, the LVT-1, was delivered to the British as the priority of amphibious training emerged. These were augmented by 100 LVT-2s and later by the delivery of at least 500 LVT-4s – and it was this variant that acquired the 'Fantail' codename and 'Buffalo' nickname.

The LVT-4 was commonly used by British forces by spring 1945, some of them operated by the specialised 79th Armoured Division created by the ingenious General Sir Percy Hobart. The 79th had been activated prior to the Normandy invasion, charged with developing and deploying purpose-designed armoured vehicles to implement combat engineering solutions from behind armour. In addition to Buffalos, the division's table of organisation and equipment included Sherman DD swimming tanks, tanks with flails that could clear minefields, tanks with bridging equipment and others mounting flamethrowers and spigot mortars. LVTs were right at home in Hobart's command, and its versatility was a critical asset during offensive operations in Europe as well as the Pacific.

**LVT-1s bring supplies into Guadalcanal, August 1942. LVTs were first used during the Guadalcanal campaign to provide transport, and did not see combat until later** US NHHC

## From hurricane to Alligator

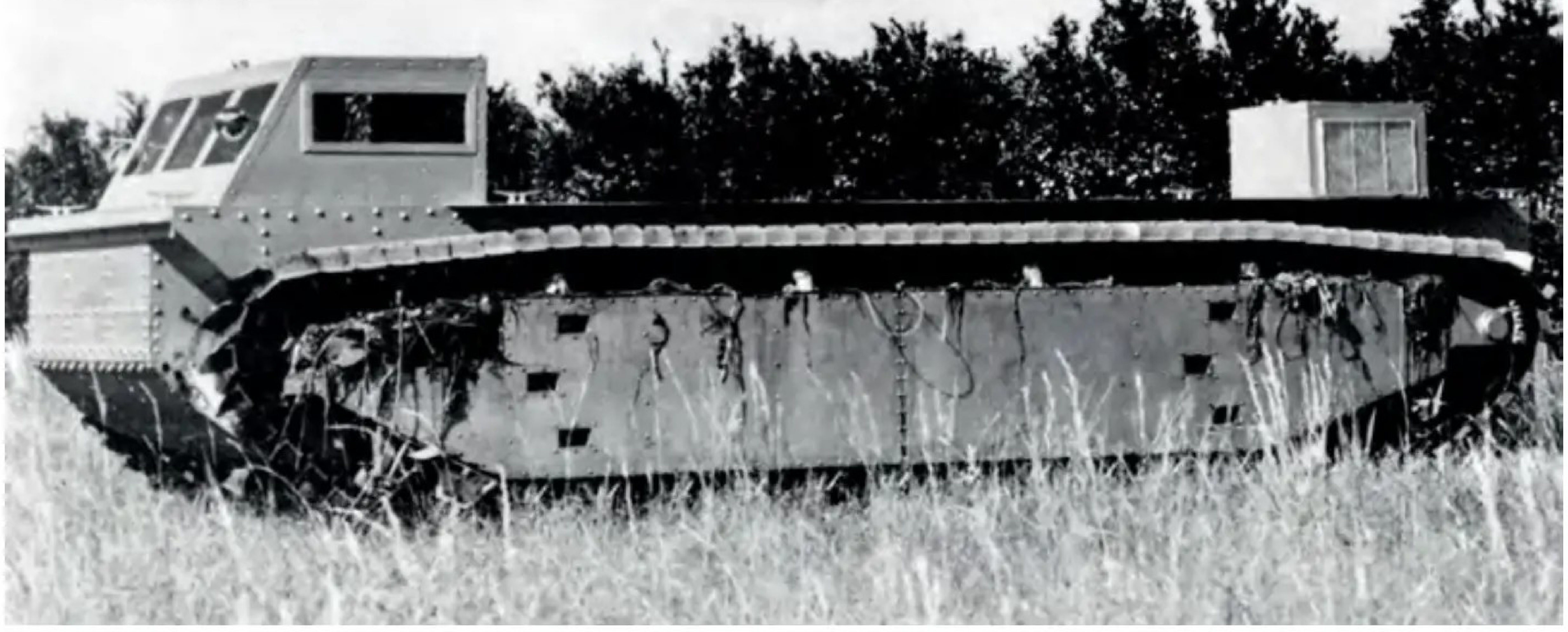
The origin of the LVT lies in the devastation wrought by a hurricane across Florida in 1926. The storm made landfall near Miami, roared across Lake Okeechobee with winds in



**An LVT-4 of 11 RTR, 79th Armoured Division, moves Canadians of the Régiment de la Chaudière along the flooded Steenheuvelsestraat in Leuth, Netherlands, during Operation Veritable, February 1945. The soldier on the bow carries a captured Sturmgewehr 44** BETTMANN/GETTY

excess of 150mph, and sucked a devastating storm surge ashore that breached numerous flood control dykes. When the waters receded, approximately 2,000 Floridians were dead. Others were marooned with no way to evacuate, and no doubt some perished in the wake of the storm – their plight worsened due to the fact no vehicle designed for rescue in the event of catastrophic storm flooding existed.

Enter Donald Roebling, a giant of a man in more ways than one. He stood well over 6ft tall and weighed



**A prototype Roebling Alligator, forerunner to the LVT. At least three prototypes were developed, each with a different style of cab and other alterations** US NATIONAL ARCHIVES

LVTs of the 82nd Assault Squadron, Royal Engineers, 79th Armoured Division, attached to XXX Corps, traverse a flooded road near Nijmegen during Operation Veritable, February 8, 1945 BETTMANN/GETTY

LVTs moved personnel and a variety of stores and equipment; these British LVT-2s unload Universal Carriers PEN & SWORD/GETTY

> *"The LVT family was an ingenious but hardly handsome development born of the necessity to transport supplies and ultimately men into battle across difficult terrain"*

an impressive 350lbs. He possessed great wealth as a member of one of America's great architectural and engineering families. He was a philanthropist, donating millions to causes he deemed worthy. He was also well known for his eccentric behaviour, and he lived lavishly in Clearwater, Florida, hosting sumptuous parties at his opulent mansion complete with marble floors, billiard parlour, wine room, Olympic-sized swimming pool and even a tunnel beneath the beautifully landscaped seven-acre tract connecting to a boathouse and tennis courts.

Roebling's wealth stemmed from his great-grandfather, John Augustus Roebling, inventor of wire rope and his grandfather, Washington Roebling, who incorporated his father's invention into the construction of the Brooklyn Bridge. During the 'Roaring Twenties' and the Great Depression, Donald Roebling, a skilled electrical engineer, explored machinery and electronics, amassed a tremendous stamp collection, and maintained radio contact with friend Richard Archbold – also a millionaire philanthropist – during the latter's exploration of New Guinea.

A second hurricane struck Florida in 1933, and Donald's father, John Roebling, could no longer abide the lack of a vehicle that might save the lives of many who would languish in future storms. Up to that time, Donald had accomplished little, but the father urged the son to take up the worthy task. Donald set about the project with vigour, constructing a prototype that could negotiate shallow water as well as land. Along with a dedicated team of associates, Donald worked to produce two prototypes. By 1937, a third mock-up was built, and when it took to water its performance was considerably better. Somewhere along the way, Roebling's invention was christened the 'Alligator'.

## Amtracs and Amtanks

From there, the potential of the new machine was soon recognised. Roebling marketed the Alligator not only for rescue work, but also for industrial and agricultural settings. By 1937, it had gained national attention when *LIFE* magazine ran an article titled *Roebling's Alligator for Florida Rescue*. When the story found its way into circulation, Rear Admiral Edward C Kalbfus took notice. Japan was active militarily in Asia and the threat of war in the Pacific was emerging, and Kalbfus foresaw the utility of the Alligator. Eventually, the design was brought to the attention of Major General Thomas Holcomb, Commandant of the US Marine Corps. The Marine Corps Equipment Board at Quantico moved forward with evaluations that finally led to an official inquiry as to cost and availability of the Alligator for government purchase. In 1938, Marine personnel visited Roebling, and the future of the Alligator began taking shape. After much wrangling amid government and military bureaucracy, Roebling continued to tweak his invention and in 1940 the first fourth-generation Alligator was delivered. Although Roebling hesitated to endorse use of his invention for military purposes, he soon committed to the project.

Recommendations from the Marines included the introduction of a more powerful engine and the fifth iteration of the vehicle, the LVT-1 – dubbed 'Amtrac' – entered production in 1941. Roebling was incapable of producing the LVT-1 in sufficient numbers and contracted with the Food Machinery Corporation to manufacture it at its Dunedin facility in Florida. In time, FMC built thousands of LVTs at Lakeland, Florida, and in Riverside and San Jose, California, as well.

In World War Two, LVTs were produced in at least eight variants. The first, the LVT-1, made its debut with Company 'A', 1st Amphibian Tractor Battalion, 5th Marines in spring 1942 at Guadalcanal, where it was used exclusively for transportation of supplies and the evacuation of wounded personnel. Its combat debut came on November 20, 1943, during Operation Galvanic, the seizure of Tarawa Atoll in the Gilbert Islands. Amtracs were essential in moving troops ashore as the Higgins boats became hung up on the coral reef that encircled the broad lagoon selected as the primary landing location. Continually under fire, the LVTs were riddled, and after the first day's fighting just 35 of the 125 deployed were still functioning.

The LVT-1 was 21ft 6in long, nearly 10ft wide and slightly more than 8ft tall. It was unarmoured but managed nearly 5mph in the water when loaded with 18 combat-ready troops or 4,500lbs of cargo. Powered by a 148hp Hercules petrol engine, it was capable of roughly 12mph on land. The vehicle weighed more than 17,000lbs fully loaded. Although it was originally unarmed, .30 or .50-calibre machine guns were often affixed in the field.

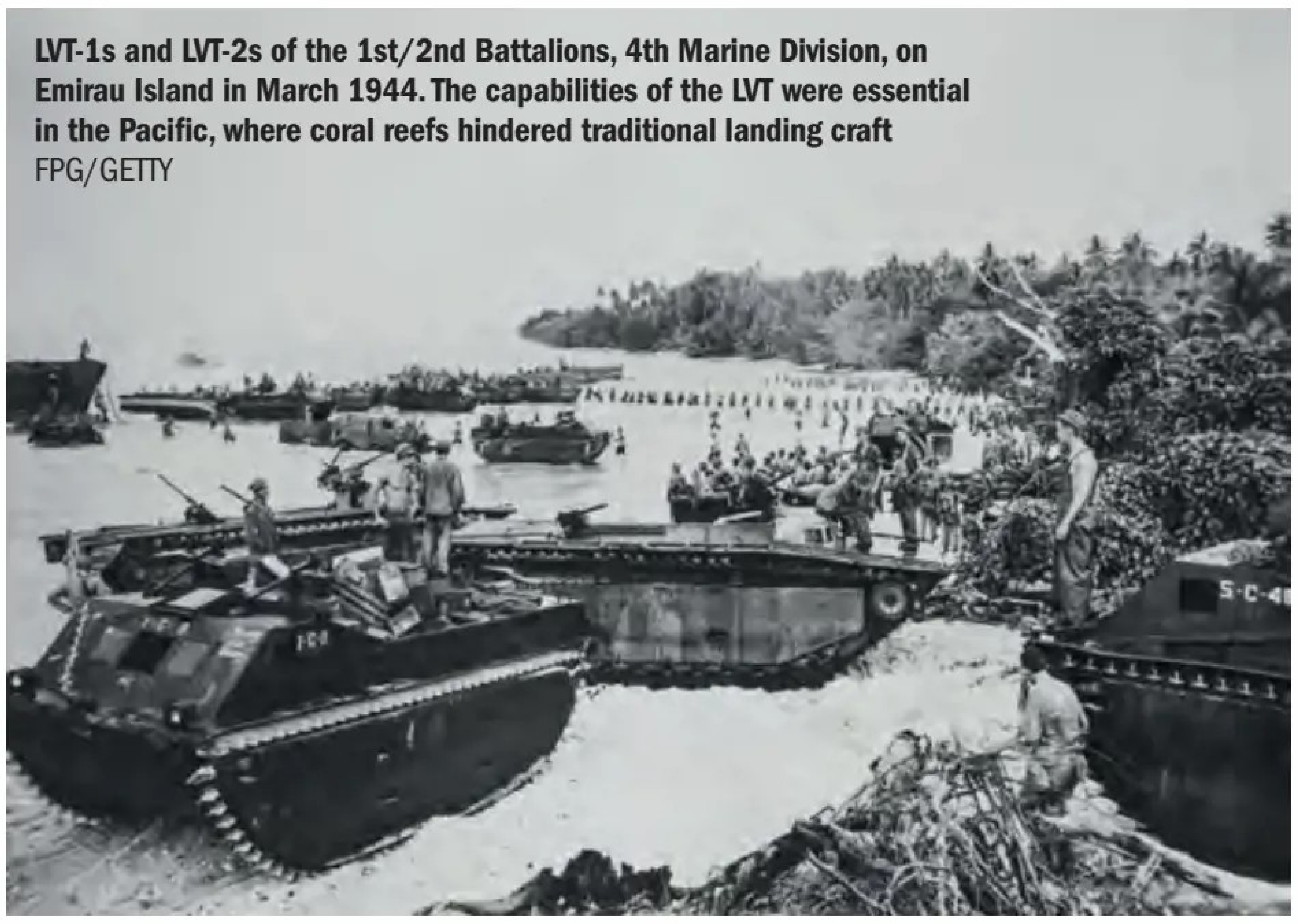
Vulnerability issues came to be addressed through the installation of armour plating to the front and cab of the vehicle, and while the LVT-1's littoral mobility was good, its tracks struggled on tough surfaces and salt-water corrosion affected the suspension and running gear. As the war in the Pacific progressed, the heavier LVT-2 (Buffalo II in British use) entered service. Preliminary drawings had been in the works since 1940, and the craft was built for combat with light armour and rails fitted for machine guns. The LVT-2 incorporated the same Continental radial engine as the M3A1 Stuart tank and carried up to 24 troops or 6,500lbs. It could also mount removable armour plating on the hull sides and front, but a more heavily armoured version was also developed, the LVT(A)-2. These, for a marginal reduction in performance, featured up to 13mm of armour and two forward-mounted machine guns behind shields.

The LVT-2 also gave rise to the 'Amtank' – the LVT(A)-1 fire support vehicle. Fitted with 12mm of hull armour and swapping carrying capacity for a turret almost identical to that used on the M3 Stuart, the vehicle carried a 37mm M6 gun and an M1919A4 machine gun behind up to 51mm of armour. Two additional .30-calibre machine guns were mounted on the rear deck.

## Normandy no-show?

Work continued on the LVT-3, but the LVT-4 beat it to service, seeing its debut at Saipan on June 15, 1944. The LVT-4 (Buffalo IV) was the ubiquitous variant, with more than 8,000 produced, also becoming the LVT most used by the British. It weighed 36,000lb full load and measured 26ft in length but was capable of 7mph on water and 15mph on road.

LVT-4s featured a new rear ramp to speed the ingress and egress of troops while the engine was relocated forward to create a larger cargo area with a capacity for 30 men, light vehicles, artillery and stores. Provision for add-on armour was included, with up to 3,000lb of capacity able to be sacrificed in favour of 13mm and 6mm plates. On later builds, a ball-mounted machine gun was added in the hull front. The vehicle was accompanied by the LVT(A)-4 Amtank, which mounted the open-topped turret from the M8 Scott and its 75mm howitzer, to tackle Japanese strongpoints at the water's edge or inland. A small number of these reached the British, with most of the 1,900 built going to the US Army/Marine Corps. From 1945, some 270 LVT(A)-4s were upgraded to (A)-5 standard.

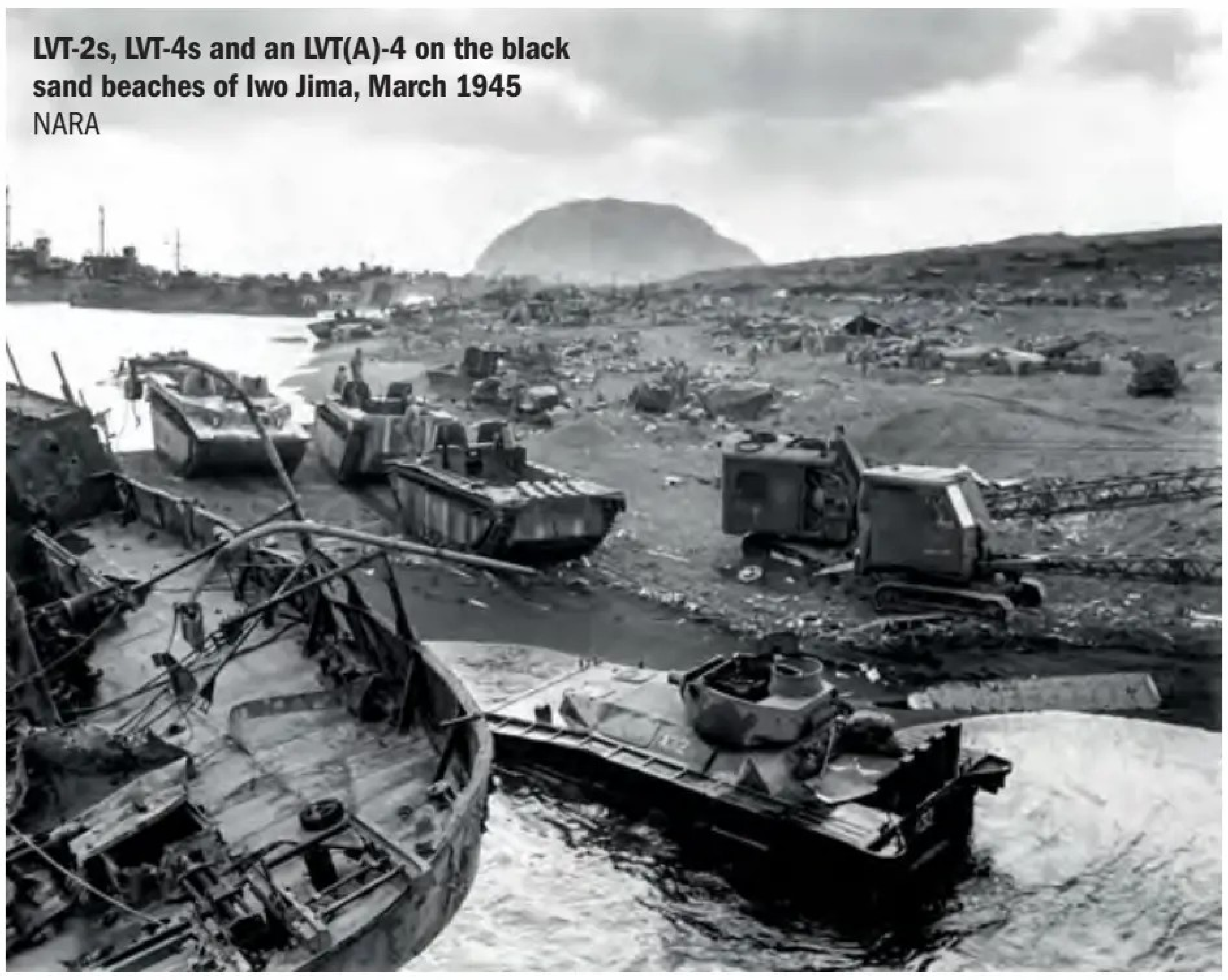

**LVT-1s and LVT-2s of the 1st/2nd Battalions, 4th Marine Division, on Emirau Island in March 1944. The capabilities of the LVT were essential in the Pacific, where coral reefs hindered traditional landing craft** FPG/GETTY

The LVT-3 'Bushmaster' finally entered service in 1945, first seeing use on Okinawa on April 1. Weighing nearly 40,000lb at full load, the LVT-3 was powered by two Cadillac V-8 engines raising 220hp. Like the LVT-4, it used re-jigged compartments to produce an enlarged cargo area, incorporated a rear ramp and had add-on armour options. Reliable and capable of carrying upwards of 9,000lbs of equipment and stores, or 30 men, almost 3,000 LVT-3s were produced and the type remained in US use until 1955. The LVT-3C conversion with armoured roof, bow extension and machine gun turret became the standard USMC LVT until 1953.

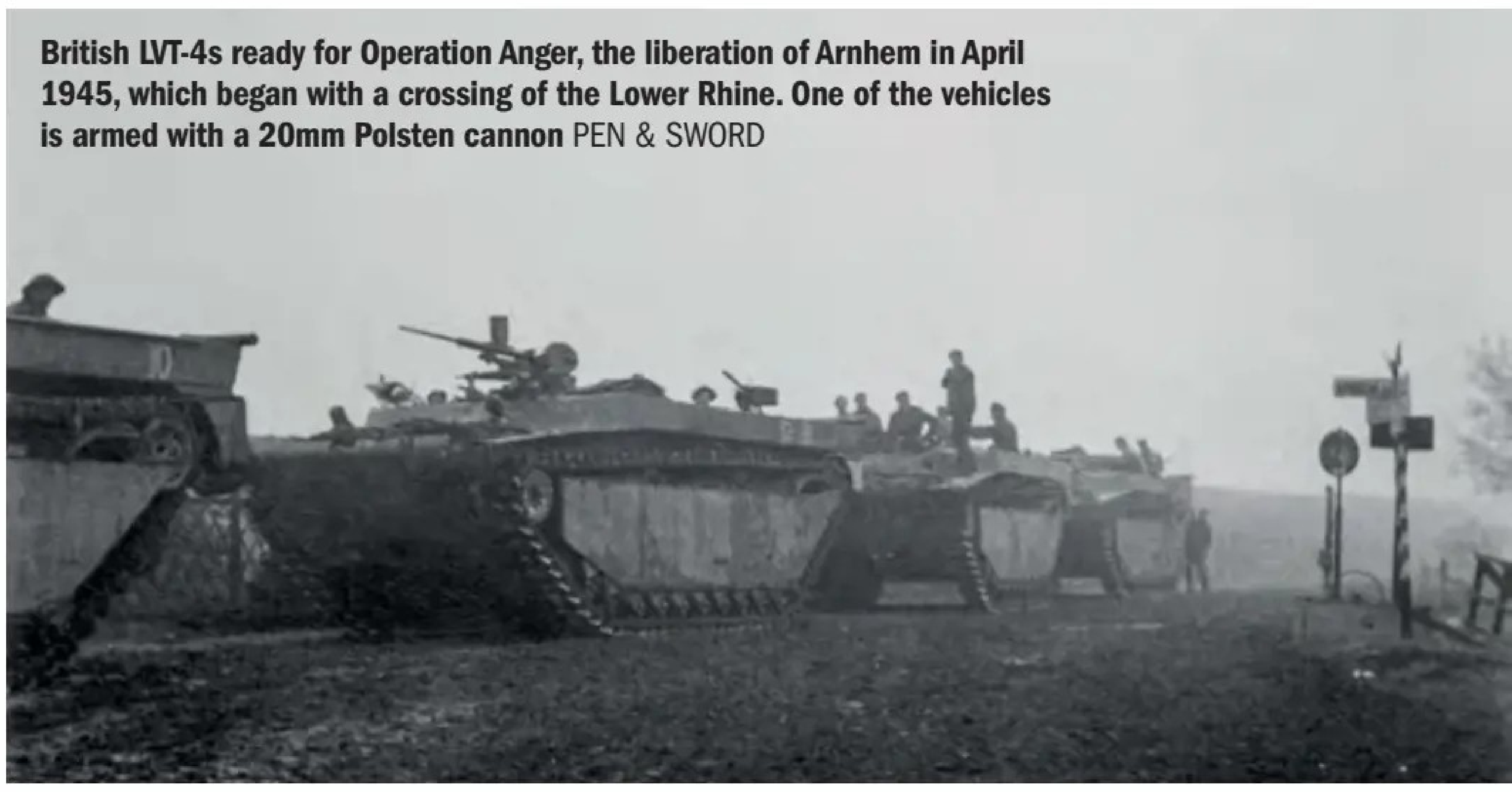
The LVT's contribution to victory in the Pacific was brought sharply into focus in 1945 when US Vice Admiral Edward Cochrane said: "There is not the slightest shadow of a doubt that the overwhelming victories of our forces at Tarawa, Kwajalein, Saipan, Tinian, Guam, Palau and Iwo Jima would not have been possible without Amtracs."

Its merits recognised, the LVT's ostensible absence from the D-Day landings of June 6, 1944, stands out when the usefulness of an armoured amphibious carrier on the Normandy beaches and during the inland push through flooded ground seems obvious. Pacific operations – where its qualities were essential – sucked up the

**Australian troops disgorge from LST-637 in LVT-4s bound for Labuan Island** CORBIS/GETTY


**LVT-2s, LVT-4s and an LVT(A)-4 on the black sand beaches of Iwo Jima, March 1945** NARA

**A Royal Marines LVT(A)-4 'Amtank' being moved on a MACK NR lorry and trailer** PALMER ARCHIVE/ALAMY



**British LVT-4s ready for Operation Anger, the liberation of Arnhem in April 1945, which began with a crossing of the Lower Rhine. One of the vehicles is armed with a 20mm Polsten cannon** PEN & SWORD

> *"The LVT's ostensible absence from D-Day stands out when the usefulness of an armoured amphibious carrier on the Normandy beaches and during the inland push through flooded ground seems obvious"*

lion's share of production, but several hundred were in British service, so it is plausible enough were available to supplement landing craft.

While preparations were under way for D-Day, the LVT was in fact evaluated, but was considered at too great a risk in negotiating the swift currents and heavy seas of the English Channel. After all, the LVT had been conceived with the generally calmer waters of the Pacific and operations to dislodge Japanese defenders from island outposts in mind.

In this role, it did excel, however, in Europe, the LVT's low freeboard was considered problematic, actual landing craft were faster in the water and there were no coral reefs to overcome. Therefore, British/Commonwealth forces opted for the LCA to land on Gold, Juno and Sword Beaches, and the US Army depended on the flat-bottomed Higgins boat to approach Utah and Omaha. Both also relied on the firepower of the DD Sherman and its 75mm gun rather than the howitzer of the LVT(A)-4, although, subsequently, LVTs were used on a limited basis to bring supplies ashore after the beachhead was established.

## American invention in British hands

British/Commonwealth forces nevertheless found the Buffalo useful during their fight at Argenta Gap in Italy in spring 1945, as well as the battles in the marshes surrounding Lake Comacchio and the eventual breakout on the plains of the River Po. LVT-1s were also used in reconnoitring forays by the British Fourteenth Army, while delivering troops and supplies during operations in Burma and, post-war, Malaya

The storied moment in the

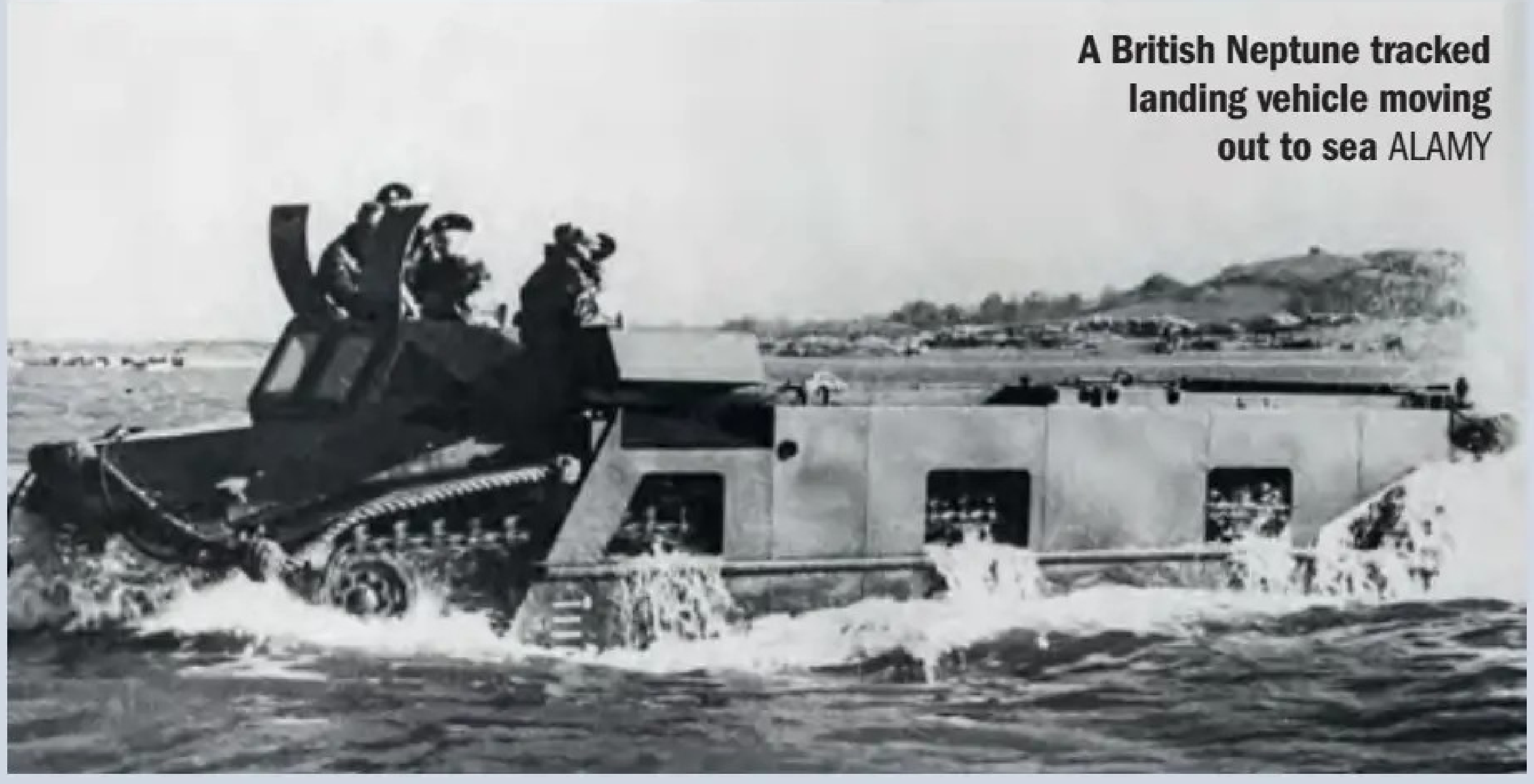
### BRITISH-BUILT BUFFALO?

**Facing shortages of LVTs, the British attempted to develop alternatives – ironically for an island nation, they have a horrible story of making tracked landing craft, says historian Ed Webster:**

"Discussions leading to an amphibious load carrier named Neptune began in January 1944. Britain sought LVT-4s but these were earmarked for US use, so they tried to replicate the LVT-3. Neptune needed to transport a 17-pounder/25-pounder gun or cargoes of up to four tonnes. Beyond its ship-to-shore role, the design called for secondary applications including use as a fuel carrier and as a casualty evacuation vehicle. Sealion – the Neptune Recovery Vehicle – was scheduled for production and other variants were in development including one with a rear-mounted crane and land anchors, and another configured as a mobile machine shop.

"Neptune needed to propel itself through open seas, land under heavy surf, cross beach or marsh terrain to reach firm ground, and carry a full load across extended routes. A road speed of 25mph and 7mph in the water was listed. Morris Motors had a prototype under construction by August 1944, but prior to this, the specifications evolved to require marine adaptations to enhance seakeeping, introduce weight savings and install a power-operated rear ramp. Where possible, existing components were sourced with the 300hp DAV Henry Meadows flat-12 taken from Covenanter, the fan drive borrowed from Centaur and the gearbox and final drives adapted from Crusader.

"Trialled in April 1945, testing was suspended due to persistent failures. Fully loaded, the craft weighed more than 20 tonnes – twice the original target, but it boasted a fair cargo capacity and was decently seaworthy. However, the road wheels tended to detach and while performance in estuary mud was good, the build-up of mud dislodged the tracks. Suggested modifications included a revised cab, altered exhaust layout and changes to weapon mounts. Morris replied that the vehicle was a cargo carrier and provision to arm/armour it would fundamentally alter its core design.



**A British Neptune tracked landing vehicle moving out to sea** ALAMY

"In the end, the LVT-4 – which the British were eventually able to procure – carried the same load yet weighed significantly less and could be adapted into assault configurations. Neptune was slower, heavier, wider, unwieldy, fragile and unreliable. Despite these shortcomings, several entered service. Most were decommissioned a few years later, filled with ballast and repurposed as flood defences. Five are believed to be buried in the Midlands today!

"There were few British attempts to create such vehicles, including the Argosy – big, solid and good enough, but it had flaws, lacking a hatch or ramp. There was also the post-war NACT-X, an LCM landing craft on tracked running gear – I'd argue that was the worst military vehicle Britain ever made."

**A LVT-4 used as an amphibious ambulance during the Scheldt operation**
D CARSON/PROVINCIAL ARCHIVES OF ALBERTA

LVT's European service was the clearance of the Scheldt. On the eve of Operation Infatuate, Lieutenant-Colonel C Farndale Phillips, who had led 47 (Royal Marine) Commando across Gold Beach, surveyed the scene in Ostend and observed "the forms of all manner of LVT, Weasels, landing craft and all the pedimenta connected with a large amphibious operation."

The key to success lay with the capture of Walcheren. LVT-2s and LVT-4s were essential in transporting troops across the swampy, estuary. Not only was the area continually sodden, but the Germans had opened dykes to further saturate the ground and make it unsuitable for vehicle movement. The British/Canadians too, knowing they could rely on the LVT, ensured Walcheren was inundated to break up the German defences. When the Commandos headed ashore on November 1, 1944, they came under tremendous fire. Some LVTs lurched and began belching fire. Others stopped dead in the water and began to sink. However, the crews and remaining vehicles completed their tasks, disgorging men and materiel onto the beaches. Those that remained serviceable would perform the vital service of transporting further supplies and evacuating wounded. Other Allied troops approached aboard LCAs.

Landing at Westkapelle, the LVTs took fearful fire. Captain Dan Flunder of 'A' Troop, 48 Commando, recalled: "Several craft in our wave were hit, including my own, and as we limped in at reduced speed there was a Buffalo on fire behind me. 'A' Troop had ten casualties before getting ashore, and shells fell fall pretty thickly in the gap as we landed. As I looked back, I saw our Buffalos burning fiercely."

On March 23, 1945, the Buffalo played a key part in Operation Plunder, the 21st Army Group's crossing of the Rhine. Originally deemed fit only for supply transport from offshore vessels, the Buffalo had become significant in the personnel carrier role. Taking dozens at a time, they moved Commonwealth soldiers to the east bank of the Rhine, facilitating movement deeper into Germany. Rehearsals were held with infantry boarding and debarking from Buffalos on riverbanks and in shallow water, and during the crossing they ferried not only soldiers and supplies but also artillery and anti-aircraft guns. Many British LVT-4s were armed with a 20mm Polsten cannon, others carried specialist engineering equipment.

Just before 2200hrs on March 23, 1945, the first rumbled into the Rhine, their freeboards sparing only a foot from deck to water. The amphibians plied the waters, swimming shore-to-shore in just 210 seconds. They battled swift currents and braved the lethal fire sent their way.

Lieutenant-Colonel A Lewis, leading No.6 Commando, watched the LVT-4s enter the river: "One was overladen. When the driver took off, the thing dove straight into the river. Many of the men had their rucksacks still on their backs, and some were drowned with the weight of them. My second-in-command happened to be in that boat. Fortunately, he had taken off his rucksack, so was rescued. He used to wear a monocle quite frequently, so the *Daily Mirror* came out with a headline *Monocled Major Swims the Rhine*."

Although some crossings were made with little opposition,

## UP FROM THE DEPTHS

When 16 LVT-4s were sent to flood-stricken Lincolnshire in 1947, they were engaged in repairing flood defences and preventing the onrushing waters of the swollen River Welland from inflicting further damage. However, five of the vehicles were swept away by the marauding currents.

Many locals believed the LVTs would never be seen again, and the story of their disappearance became something of a local legend. People even began to ask, 'did it really happen?'

While the topic was bandied about during the succeeding years, one man became intent on finding an LVT and bringing the story to light: "My grandfather pestered me for years to find it as people thought it was just a myth," Daniel Abbott told the BBC. "People said we were wasting people's time, the army tried in 1947 to recover it and failed, but then we found it." The Buffalos had last been seen near Crowland, and Abbott was determined to find at least one. So, in spring 2021, 74 years after their disappearance, the effort to locate a lost LVT paid off. Excavations began, and the vehicle was found in remarkable condition due to its immersion in the oxygen-depleted peat and clay. "I'm over the moon with what we've achieved," Abbott told *The Times*. "It's very exciting. We found the gun mount first and it's in fantastic condition for its age. The vehicle seems to have been well preserved in the clay."

Recently, the Crowland Buffalo LVT Association revealed plans for the construction of a museum at Kennulphs Farm, Crowland. After receiving approval to renovate an existing farm building, the project has generated quite a bit of excitement while the recovered LVT is often now seen at vehicle shows. The success of the first effort to find a buried LVT has spurred interest in another foray to locate and recover a second.

**LVT-4s bound for 'purple' and 'orange' beaches on Okinawa pass USS *Tennessee* as the battleship engages Japanese defences with its main and secondary guns, April 1, 1945** US NHHC

| LVT 2/4 VS CONTEMPORARY AMPHIBIOUS TRACTORS | | | | | LVT(A)-4 VS CONTEMPORARY AMPHIBIOUS TANKS | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **LVT-2** | **LVT-4** | **Type 4 Ka-Tsu** | **LWS I** | **LVT(A)-4** | **M2A2 (Sherman III) DD** | **Type 2 Ka-Mi** | **T-40** |
| **Country:** | United States | United States | Japan | Germany | United States | Britain | Japan | Soviet Union |
| **Service:** | 1942-45 | 1944-50s | 1944-45 | 1940-45* | 1944-50s | 1944-45 | 1942-45 | 1941-46 |
| **Length:** | 23ft 1in (7.1m) | 26ft (7.9m) | 36ft 1in (11m) | 28ft 3in (8.6m) | 26ft 1in (7.95m) | 19ft 10½in (6.06m) | 24ft 4in (7.4m)* | 13ft 6in (4.1m) |
| **Height:** | 8ft 1in (2.45m) | 8ft 1in | 6ft 6in (2m) | 10ft 3in (3.1m) | 10ft 2.5in (3.25m) | 9ft (2.75m) | 7ft 8in (2.35m) | 6ft 3in (1.9m) |
| **Weight (loaded):** | 14 tonnes | 16.5 tonnes | 16 tonnes | 17 tonnes | 18 tonnes | 33.6 tonnes | 12.3 tonnes | 5.9 tonnes |
| **Powerplant:** | Continental W-670-9A 7-cyl petrol, 250hp | Continental W-670-9A 7-cyl petrol, 250hp | Mitsubishi A6120VDe 6-cyl diesel, 115hp | Maybach HL120 V12 petrol, 300hp | Continental W-670-9A 7-cyl petrol, 250hp | Continental R975C1 9-cyl petrol, 400hp | Mitsubishi A6120VDe 6-cyl diesel, 115hp | GAZ-202 petrol, 70hp |
| **Armour:** | 6mm + 10mm plates | 14mm + 6mm/13mm plates | 3mm + 10mm plates | N/A | Up to 38mm | Up to 76mm | Up to 12mm | Up to 13mm |
| **Max speed/ range (road)** | 20mph/150mi | 15mph/250mi | 21mph/Unk | 21mph/93mi | 25mph/125mi | 29mph/121mi | 23mph/105mi | 28mph/280mi |
| **Max speed/ range (water)** | 6kts/43.5nmi | 6kts/65nmi | 5kts/Unk | 6.5kts/39nmi | 6kts/65nmi | 4kts/2.7nmi | 6kts/75nmi | 3.2kts/Unk |
| **Armament:** | 4 x .50 M2HB HMGs/.30 M1919A4 MGs | 4 x .50 M2HB HMGs/.30 M1919A4 MGs, 1 x M1919A4 MG (bow), 1 x 20mm Polsten cannon (British) | 2 x 18in Type 91 torpedo (assault), 2 x 13mm Type 93 HMGs | 1 x 7.92mm MG34 GPMG (optional) | 1 x 75mm M2/M3 howitzer, 3 x .30 M1919A4 MGs | 1 x 75mm M3 gun, 2 x .30 M1919A4 MGs | 1 x 37mm Type 1 gun, 2 x 7.7mm Type 97 MGs | 1 x 12.7 DShK HMG, 1 x 7.62mm DT MG |
| **Crew:** | 3+24 | 3+30 | 5+40 | 2+20 | 6 | 5 | 5 | 2 |
| **Capacity:** | 6,500lbs | 9,000lbs | 8,800lbs | 4,000lbs** | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| **No. built** | 2,962 | 8,351 | 49 | 100 | 1,890 | ~800 | 184 | 443 |
| Notes: *Three prototypes issued in 1940, type fully entered service in 1942.<br>**Could tow Kässbohrer amphibious trailer with 10-20 tonnes of cargo | | | | | Notes: *Dimensions and weight include detachable pontoons | | | |

others were contested. Braving German machine guns and mortars, LVTs were subjected to heavy punishment. One was struck by a phosphorous shell. Flames shot 15ft skyward and nine men were killed outright. However, as soon as one contingent of troops was deposited on Rhine's east shore, intrepid crews still able to function returned for another load.

After World War Two, the early LVT designs were dropped. The US operated LVT-3/3Cs and a limited number of other types in Korea, but by Vietnam, the LVTP-5 was in service which, in turn, gave way to the LVTP-7/AAVP-7A1. France used LVT-4/LVT(A)-4 in Indochina where the vehicles were armed with machine guns, 57mm recoilless rifles and 40mm cannon. Nationalist China operated several in its bitter civil war where captured examples were put into Communist use. Buffalo IVs remained in service with the British in Korea, and during the 1956 Suez Crisis 40 and 42 Commando came ashore at Port Said in them. Other examples were decommissioned and used in repairing damaged flood control structures in Lincolnshire and elsewhere through the late 1940s.

Pacific island hopping, Walcheren and the Rhine validated the capabilities of the LVT. Donald Roebling, its philanthropist inventor, was awarded the Medal of Merit by President Harry Truman in December 1948. He died on August 29, 1959, aged 50. BW

**A British flamethrower-armed LVT-4 comes ashore in Korea** PALMER ARCHIVE/ALAMY

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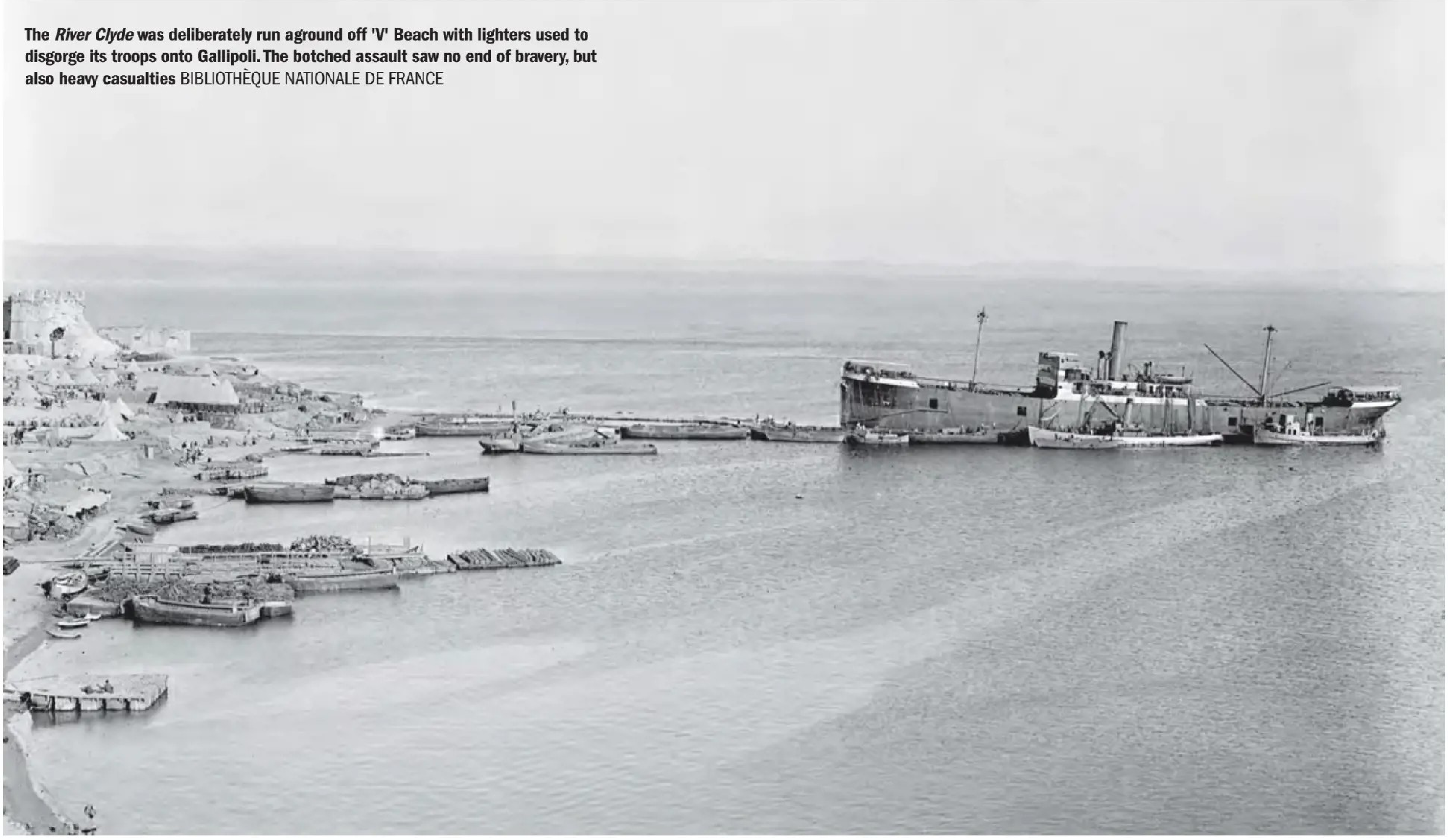
## Midshipman George Leslie Drewry, VC

**George Drewry VC** IWM Q79788

# HERO of the MONTH

by Lord Ashcroft



**The *River Clyde* was deliberately run aground off 'V' Beach with lighters used to disgorge its troops onto Gallipoli. The botched assault saw no end of bravery, but also heavy casualties** BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE DE FRANCE

George Leslie Drewry was so accident-prone during his life, both as a boy and as a young sailor, that in some ways it is remarkable that he made it to the age of 23. Despite his tendency to get into the most dangerous situations, one thing was certain: he was extremely brave and this, coupled with his gritty determination and loyalty to his senior officers, made him a first-rate serviceman during World War One.

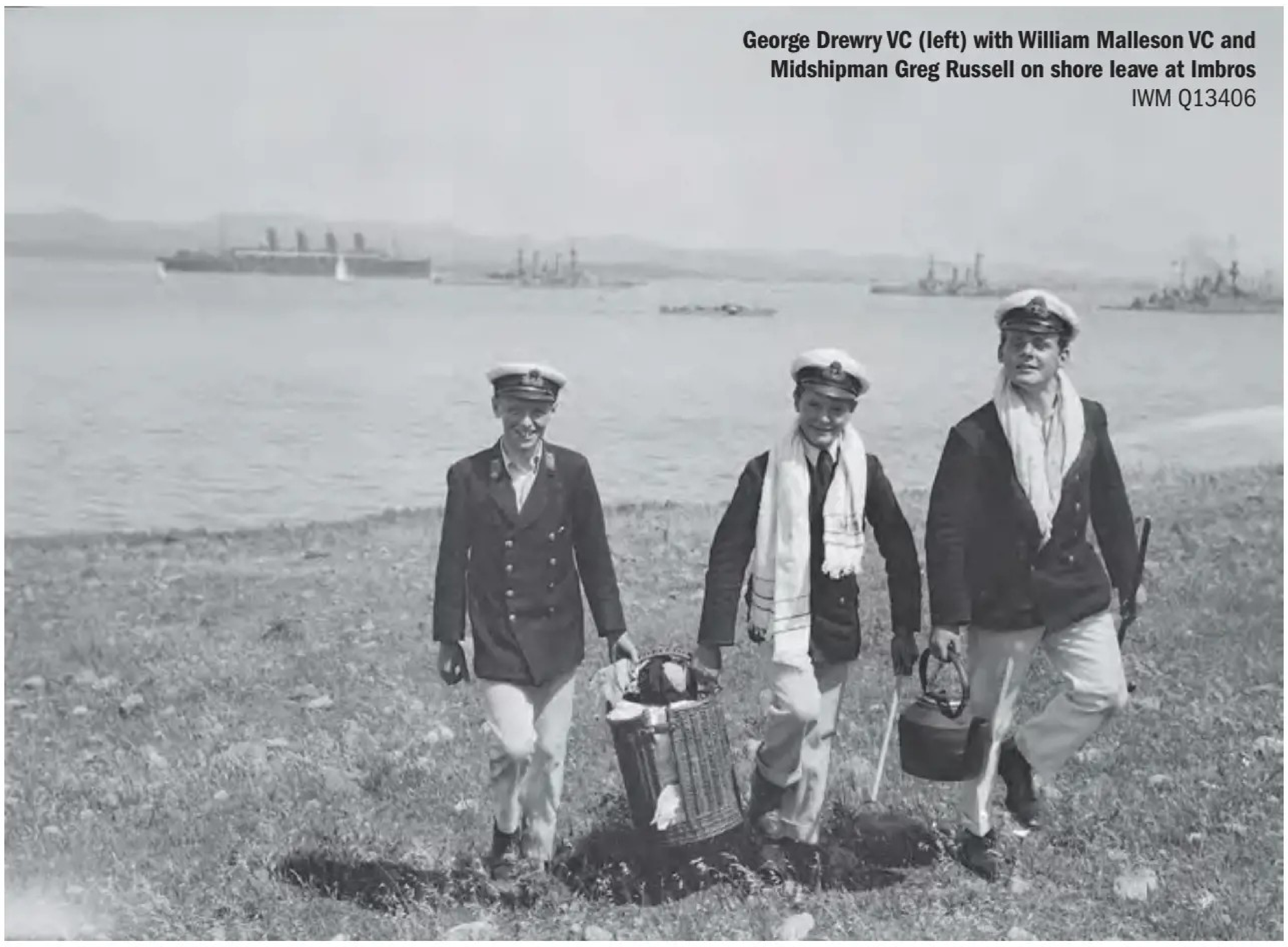
Drewry was born in Forest Gate, London, on November 3, 1894. The third eldest of four sons, his parents were Thomas Drewry and Mary (née Kendall). Thomas had a job as a works manager for The Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company (P&O), so the family had links with the sea.

George attended Merchant Taylors' School in Blackheath, southeast London, but as a youngster he nearly died on at least two occasions. He had a serious accident when he was run over and injured by a car, on another occasion he and one of his brothers, Ralph, fell into a bog while playing in Wanstead Park. By the time their cries for help were answered, they were up to their necks in mud, but both were fortunately rescued relatively unharmed.

Aged 14, Drewry enlisted in the Merchant Navy, and it was not long before his run of misfortune continued with yet another life-threatening calamity. While taking part in a training exercise on board the sailing boat *Indian Empire*, he fell from the ship's mast into the sea. Only the heroic actions of the ship's mate, who dived into the sea, saved Drewry's life. In yet a further disaster in 1912, his ship was wrecked on the uninhabited Hermite Island in Tierra del Fuego as it rounded Cape Horn. Drewry and several crewmates survived for two weeks on a diet of roots and shellfish before being found and rescued.

Later in 1912, after returning to Britain, Drewry joined P&O as a fourth officer, sailing on long-distance routes to destinations including Australia, China and Japan. The following year, on July 1, he joined the Royal Naval Reserve.

On August 3, 1914, following the outbreak of World War One, he was called up and posted as a midshipman aboard the ageing torpedo boat-turned-minesweeper HMS *Hussar*. His early roles included taking part in mail and other deliveries when operating in the Mediterranean. However, in April 1915, he was transferred to SS *River Clyde*, a modified collier converted into an assault ship, and instructed to take part in the preparations for the Gallipoli landings. The ship was captained by Commander Edward Unwin, then aged 51 and having



**George Drewry VC (left) with William Malleson VC and Midshipman Greg Russell on shore leave at Imbros** IWM Q13406

**Commander Edward Unwin VC (left), who took *River Clyde* into 'V' Beach, as the Beach Master at Suvla** TOPFOTO

been called out of retirement, to whom Drewry, then 20, was devoted, according to comrades.

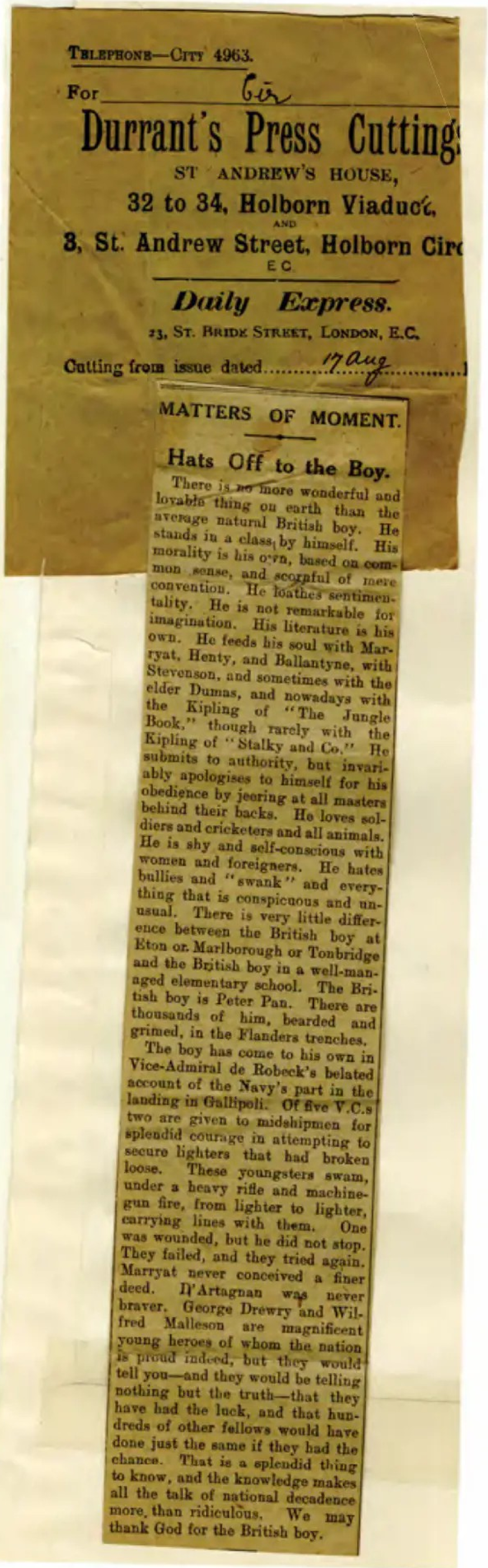
The Gallipoli campaign began in the early hours of April 25, 1915, when the 29th Division landed on Cape Helles. The first wave put ashore were from the steamship *River Clyde* on one of the designated landing points: 'V' Beach, which was 300 yards long and dominated by an old fort at Sedd-el-Bahr at its eastern end. This was the landing place allotted to some 2,000 men from the Dublin Fusiliers and Munster Fusiliers. Once the initial landing had taken place, the plan devised by Commander Unwin was to bring in further troops from *River Clyde*, which was to be run aground just offshore. The gap between *River Clyde* and the shore was to be bridged by a small flat-bottomed steamboat, *Argyll*, augmented by three lighters.

Under heavy fire from the enemy, events did not go to plan and *River Clyde* grounded too far from *Argyll* to be of immediate use. Amid the chaos, Unwin, accompanied by Able Seaman William Williams, leapt into the water and dragged the lighters forward to form a bridge to the shore via a shoal of rocks that jutted out into the sea close to the fort. However, there was nothing to which the mooring ropes could be attached, so Unwin and Williams had to stand in the water holding the ropes in place. After more than an hour in the water, Williams was fatally wounded by a Turkish shell and this, in effect, cut the link to the shore.

> *"Despite his tendency to get into the most dangerous situations, one thing was certain: George Drewry was extremely brave and this, coupled with his gritty determination and loyalty, made him a first-rate serviceman"*

As chaos ensued, Midshipmen Drewry and William Malleson, along with Seaman George Samson, again under fire, formed a bridge of lighters between *River Clyde* and *Argyll*. Drewry later wrote: "I got a rope from the lighter to the spit and then, with difficulty, I hauled the captain onto the lighter – he was nearly done and I was alone. He went inboard and the doctor had rather a job with him. All the time shells were falling all around us and into the ship, one hitting the casing of the ship but doing no further damage. Several men were killed in the No.4 hold. I stayed on the lighters and tried to keep the men going ashore, but it was murder and soon the first lighter was covered with dead and wounded and the spit was awful, the sea round it for some yards was red. When they got ashore, they were little better off, for they were picked off many of them before they could dig themselves in."

As the fighting continued, Drewry was seriously wounded while standing on one of the lighters helping troops from another transport ship to come ashore. He wrote: "Just as we hit the hopper, a piece of shrapnel hit me on the head, knocking me down for a second or two and covering me with blood. However, we made the lighter fast to the hopper and then I went below. A



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MATTERS OF MOMENT.

Hats Off to the Boy.

There is no more wonderful and lovable thing on earth than the average natural British boy. He stands in a class by himself. His morality is his own, based on common sense, and scornful of mere convention. He loathes sentimentality. He is not remarkable for imagination. His literature is his own. He feeds his soul with Marryat, Henty, and Ballantyne, with Stevenson, and sometimes with the elder Dumas, and nowadays with the Kipling of "The Jungle Book," though rarely with the Kipling of "Stalky and Co." He submits to authority, but invariably apologises to himself for his obedience by jeering at all masters behind their backs. He loves soldiers and cricketers and all animals. He is shy and self-conscious with women and foreigners. He hates bullies and "swank" and everything that is conspicuous and unusual. There is very little difference between the British boy at Eton or Marlborough or Tonbridge and the British boy in a well-managed elementary school. The British boy is Peter Pan. There are thousands of him, bearded and grimed, in the Flanders trenches.

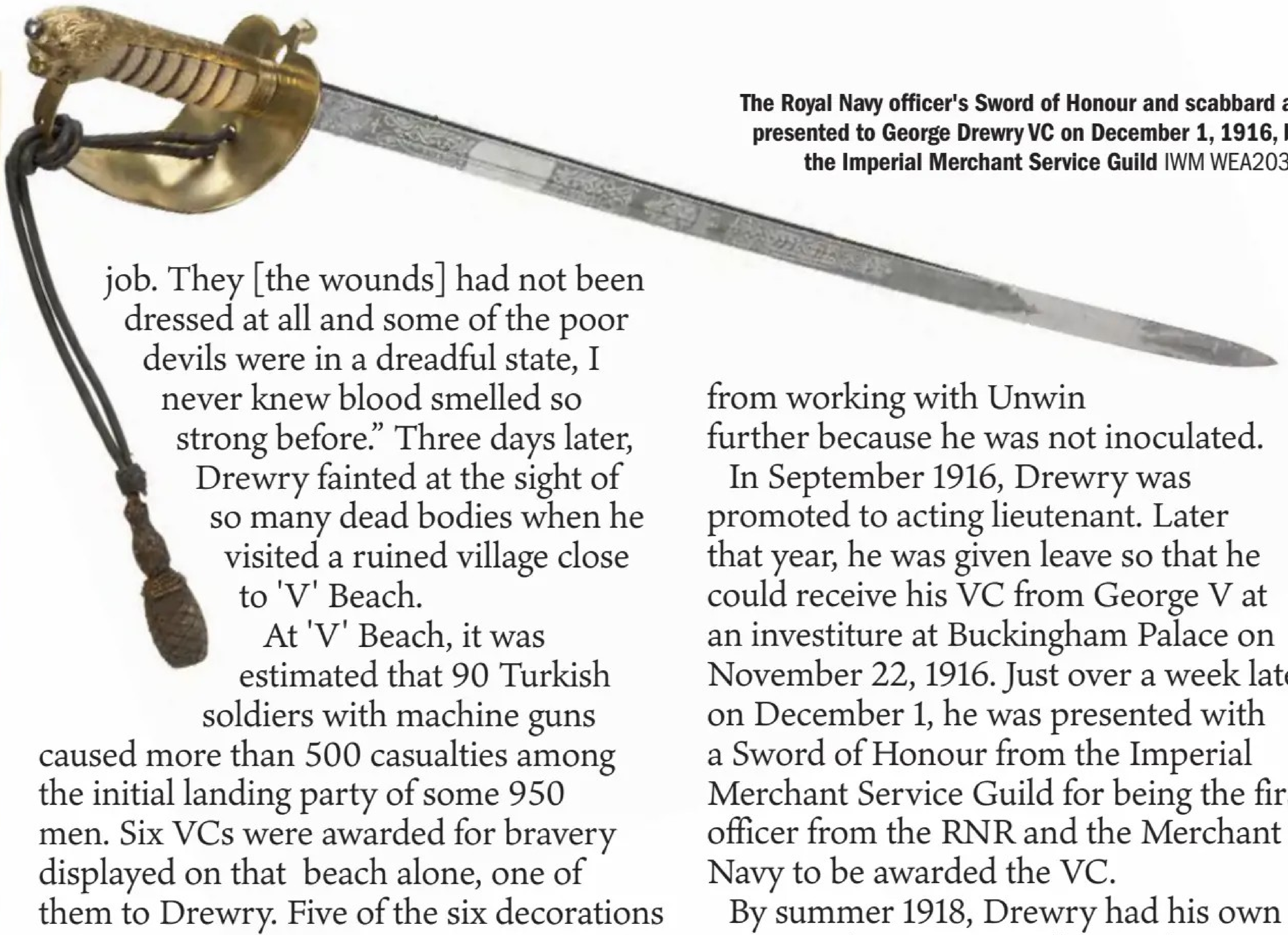
The boy has come to his own in Vice-Admiral de Robeck's belated account of the Navy's part in the landing in Gallipoli. Of five V.C.s two are given to midshipmen for splendid courage in attempting to secure lighters that had broken loose. These youngsters swam, under a heavy rifle and machine-gun fire, from lighter to lighter, carrying lines with them. One was wounded, but he did not stop. They failed, and they tried again. Marryat never conceived a finer deed. D'Artagnan was never braver. George Drewry and Wilfred Malleson are magnificent young heroes of whom the nation is proud indeed, but they would tell you—and they would be telling nothing but the truth—that they have had the luck, and that hundreds of other fellows would have done just the same if they had the chance. That is a splendid thing to know, and the knowledge makes all the talk of national decadence more than ridiculous. We may thank God for the British boy.

**A cutting from the *Daily Express* of August 17, 1915, describing Drewry's award. This was kept by his father and presented to the Imperial War Museum in 1918** IWM LBY BOS 66

Tommy put a scarf around my head and I went up again."

Next, Drewry leapt into the water to try to reach another lighter that had drifted out to sea. However, the rope he had taken with him was too short and he had to give up. Eventually, after a chaotic period of more than four hours, the assault was suspended and many of the wounded were recovered thanks to the brave deeds of Unwin and his men.

For the rest of the day and into the night, Drewry took wounded men from the hopper and the lighters and placed them in a trawler that was situated alongside *River Clyde*. He later described this as "an awful job. They [the wounds] had not been dressed at all and some of the poor devils were in a dreadful state, I never knew blood smelled so strong before." Three days later, Drewry fainted at the sight of so many dead bodies when he visited a ruined village close to 'V' Beach.



**The Royal Navy officer's Sword of Honour and scabbard as presented to George Drewry VC on December 1, 1916, by the Imperial Merchant Service Guild** IWM WEA2036

At 'V' Beach, it was estimated that 90 Turkish soldiers with machine guns caused more than 500 casualties among the initial landing party of some 950 men. Six VCs were awarded for bravery displayed on that beach alone, one of them to Drewry. Five of the six decorations were announced in *The London Gazette* on the same day – August 16, 1915 – with Drewry's modest citation failing to do justice in many ways to his prolonged bravery: "Assisted Commander Unwin at the work of securing the lighters under heavy rifle and Maxim fire. He was wounded in the head but continued his work and twice subsequently tried to swim from lighter to lighter with a line."

The other four VC recipients announced that day were Commander Unwin, Midshipman Malleson, Able Seaman Williams and Seaman Samson. Sub Lieutenant Arthur Tisdall, who had also helped in the rescue operation on 'V' Beach, was awarded his VC posthumously on March 31, 1916 – he had been killed on May 6, 1915, at Achi Baba during further fighting on the peninsula.

Commander Unwin's citation was the fullest and ended with a moving tribute to his courage. "He was later again attended by the doctor for three abrasions caused by bullets, after which he once more left the ship, this time in a lifeboat, to save some wounded men who were lying in shallow water near the beach. He continued at this heroic labour under continuous enemy fire until forced to stop through pure physical exhaustion."

On July 1, 1915, Drewry again helped with the landings, this time at Suvla Bay. Here he found it "uncanny" that the troops could be landed with hardly any reaction from the Turks. He later wrote: "I thought of Helles and then wondered if we had landed instead at Lemnos [the British base] or if we were [going to be] ambushed and if the Maxims were going to clear the beach of living in one sweep."

For five days, Drewry worked hard delivering men and supplies and he later received a Mention in Despatches for his courage and duty. However, he rejoined *Hussar* on August 11 having been prevented from working with Unwin further because he was not inoculated.

In September 1916, Drewry was promoted to acting lieutenant. Later that year, he was given leave so that he could receive his VC from George V at an investiture at Buckingham Palace on November 22, 1916. Just over a week later, on December 1, he was presented with a Sword of Honour from the Imperial Merchant Service Guild for being the first officer from the RNR and the Merchant Navy to be awarded the VC.

By summer 1918, Drewry had his own command on HMT *William Jackson*, a decoy trawler. On the evening of August 2, 1918, while serving aboard his ship at Scapa Flow in the Orkneys, he was struck by a block that fell from a derrick. He fractured his skull and broke an arm, dying from his head injuries the next day, aged 23. Drewry was buried in the City of London Cemetery, Manor Park, and a memorial window was later erected in his honour at All Saints Church, Forest Gate, close to where he was born.

From the day he was born to the day he died, George Drewry had always been a modest man devoted to duty. As his brother Ralph put it, George never expected the VC and always played down the award: "When I showed him all the newspaper cuttings about him that we had kept, he told me to put them in the toilet."

This fits with my own experiences of meeting with and speaking to scores of recipients of gallantry awards in recent decades: the bravest individuals are invariably also the humblest too. BW

## VICTORIA CROSS HEROES VOL II

Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC is a businessman, philanthropist, author and pollster. His book, *Victoria Cross Heroes Vol II*, was published in 2016. For more information, visit victoriacrossheroes2.com. For more information on Lord Ashcroft's work, visit lordashcroft.com. Visit his website about courage at lordashcroftonbravery.com. Follow him on X and Facebook: @LordAshcroft

ROUGH RIDERS
PETER DOYLE
RELUCTANT PARTNER

# Military History with Pete and Gary

No.44

One of Pete's heroes is James McCudden. He was born on March 28, 1895, in Gillingham to an Irish family with a strong tradition of military service. Like his father, James joined the Royal Engineers at just 15 in 1910. He served in Gibraltar and with No.6 Field Company at Weymouth. In 1913, he followed his older brother and transferred into the newly formed Royal Flying Corps as an air mechanic.

James was deployed with 3 Squadron to France in August 1914 and performed ground crew duties. Promoted to first corporal and then sergeant, he began to carry out an increasing number of flying hours as an observer/air gunner in 1915. Early on December 19, McCudden was flying with Lieutenant R Saunders when they took off as part of a formation of three Morane Parasols to complete a vital reconnaissance mission over Valenciennes. A previous attempt to carry out the mission had resulted in fatalities when a lone Morane had been shot down by Leutnant Max Immelmann in his Fokker Monoplane. Fuelled by lurid press reports, the legend of the 'Fokker Scourge' was growing and Immelmann was the most feared of the new German aces.

McCudden left an account of what followed: "My pilot pointed to his left front and above, and looking in the direction he pointed, I saw a long dark brown form fairly streaking across the sky. We could see it was a German machine, and when it got above and behind our middle machine it dived on to it like a huge hawk on a hapless sparrow. I saw the black crosses on the underneath surface of the Fokker's wings – for a Fokker it was – and as it got close, Mealing, the pilot of this middle machine, turned, and thus saved himself.

"The Fokker had by now turned and was coming towards our machine, nose on, slightly above. I stood up, with my Lewis gun to the shoulder, and fired as he passed over our right wing. He carried on flying in the opposite direction until he was lost to view. We were by now over Douai aerodrome, and, looking down, I could see several enemy machines leaving the ground. I watched for a while and noticed the Fokker climbing up under our tail. I told my pilot to turn and then fired half a drum. The Fokker seemed rather surprised that we had seen him and immediately turned. After this, he climbed about 300ft above us and then put his nose down to fire."

However, young McCudden had picked his moment well: "Having been waiting for him, I opened fire at once, and he promptly pulled out of his dive and retired to a distance of 500 yards, at which he remained, for every time he came closer I fired a burst. By now we had reached Valenciennes, and were circling round, obtaining the desired information, which consisted in finding out how much rolling-stock was in Valenciennes station. The Fokker remained at a respectable distance and was doing vertical turns and such tricks. As soon as we left, he followed – just like a vulture – no doubt waiting for one of us to fall out with engine trouble.

"It was assumed the pilot was Immelmann. I was thankful to return from this outing. I had imagined that once Immelmann saw us there was not much chance. We live and learn."

It was increasingly evident that formations of determined pilots with skilful gunners were not necessarily 'Fokker fodder.' McCudden was fast gaining experience; he would end up as one of Britain's highest-scoring aces before being killed in 1918.

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*Peter Hart and Gary Bain's long running 'Pete and Gary's Military History' weekly podcast is available via podcast services. Follow Pete and Gary on X, formerly known as Twitter: @HartMilitary*

# Next Month

December 2025, issue 224

## Inside Your Magazine

On sale November 27

For years, they had adventured around the globe, mastering sand, savannah, bush and veldt. In 1914, they flocked to the British Army, where their expertise would pay dividends – but at a terrible cost. *BAW* shines a light on the Legion of Frontiersmen, a forgotten organisation that, believe it or not, is still in existence today.

Sticking with World War One, *BAW*'s Tom Baker gets a shock to the system after spending 24 hours in an authentic British wartime trench... He'll never complain about his cosy office job again!

Could Pearl Harbor have been avoided? That's the question we ask in a fascinating article concerning J Edgar Hoover, controversial head of the FBI, and his handling of British-supplied intelligence that warned of Japan's surprise attack. Then, jumping from the start of the war in the Pacific to its end, we follow the action as the Royal Navy catches up with one of Japan's last major surface warships, the cruiser *Haguro*.

*Laugh or Fly* continues, we have a timely piece from a watchmaker, and a firearm icon's greatest invention – his words, not ours – is profiled.

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News, Lord Ashcroft's Hero of the Month, reviews and more

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